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ESSAYS

PHILOSOPHICAL AND MORAL,

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY.

By W. BELSHAM.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

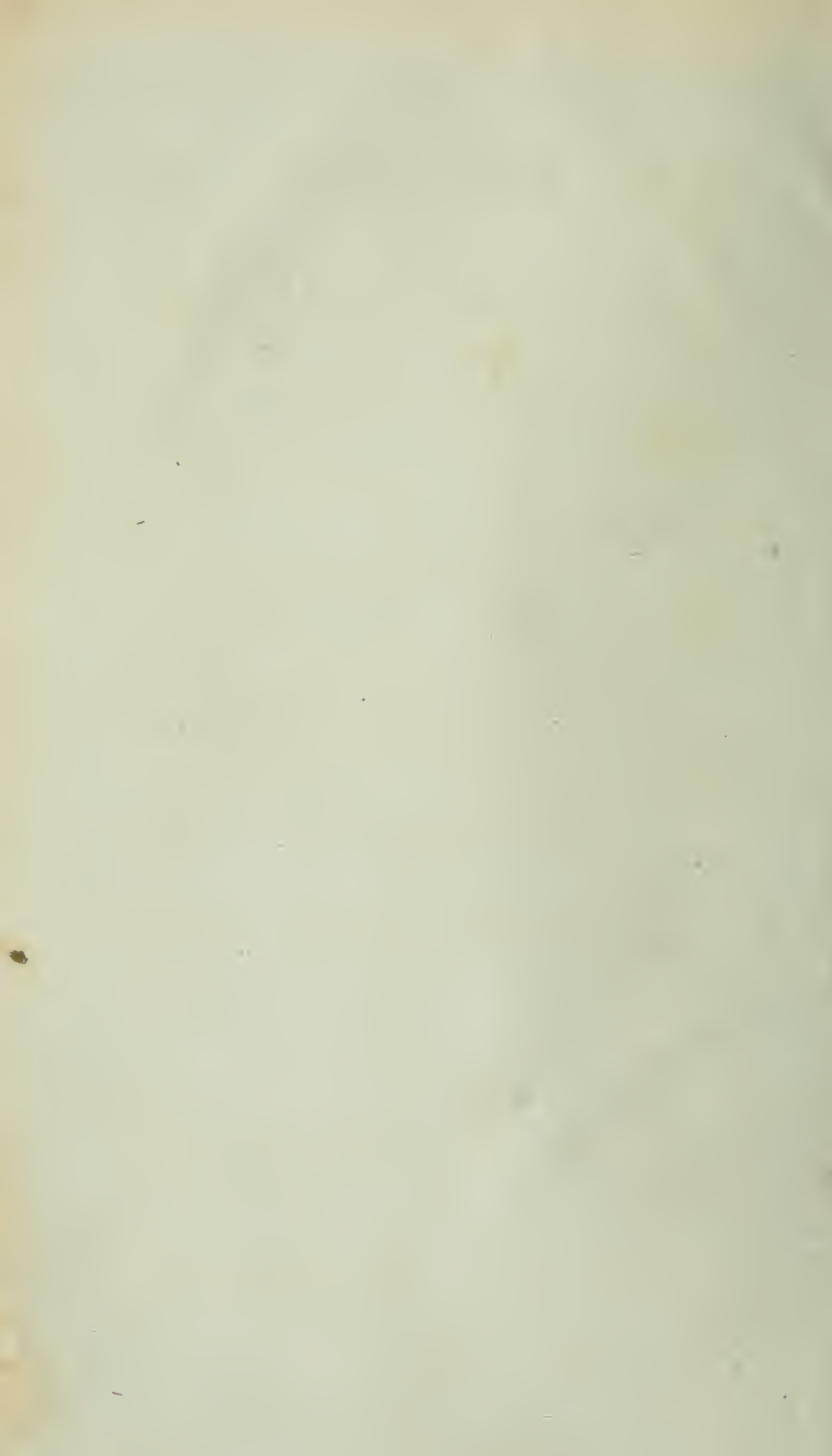
Est quiddam, quod suâ vi nos allicit ad sese, non emolumento captans aliquo,
sed trahens suâ dignitate : quod genus virtus, scientia, veritas est.

CICERO.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. G. AND J. ROBINSON, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1799.



P R E F A C E.

AFTER an Interval of near Ten Years, during the far greater Part of which the following Essays have been out of Print, it has been thought expedient, inauspicious as the Times are to literary Undertakings, to re-publish them. Though the Writer has not changed his Sentiments, during this long Space of Time, on any material Point, he has seen Reason, on a careful Revision, to make a Variety of Alterations, and, as he trusts, Improvements in these earlier Productions of his Pen. The Historical Essays on the Reigns of King Charles II. King James II. King William and Queen Anne, are, from obvious Motives, wholly omitted, and their Places supplied by occasional Essays, written and published at a more recent Period, viz. The Answer to Mr. Burke's Appeal from the New Whigs to the Old; Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform; and Observations on the Poors' Laws.

It is the Opinion of some, and to the
Writer

Writer of these Essays it always appeared a most unjust and unreasonable Opinion, that an Author, after having once given any Work to the Public, precludes himself from all future Alteration or Improvement; because the Purchasers of the First Edition would be injured in Proportion as the Value of the Edition is diminished by such Improvement. But this is supposing a Sort of virtual Contract, which no Author will admit the Existence of. All that in Honor and Justice can be demanded of him is, to exert his utmost Ability to give that Degree of Perfection to his Work which it is capable of receiving at the Period of Publication—not to debar himself from the Means of future Improvement. As to the Injury that may be eventually sustained by the original Purchasers, it is obvious to reply, that every literary Purchase may properly be considered in the Light of a *Speculation*. In certain Circumstances the Purchase will rise, in other Circumstances it will sink in Value; and these Contingencies can neither be foreseen or prevented. Every original Purchaser knows the Conditions of Sale; and it would be in the
highest

highest Degree selfish and injurious, to wish to deprive future Purchasers of an Advantage which it was not in the Power of the Writer to impart to him. Every one is at Liberty, as Dr. Johnson has remarked, either to incur the Sort of Risque attached to an early Purchase, or to wait the Event. In the one Case his Curiosity receives an early Gratification; in the other his Patience may be rewarded with a fuller Satisfaction,

These general Observations are not in any peculiar Degree applicable to the present Volumes. The Alterations and Additions, though not wholly inconsiderable, are not of material Importance. In a very few Instances, where the Author thought he might be justly charged with Diffuseness, two Essays have been consolidated into one. In others, which seemed to want farther Elucidation, new Arguments and Illustrations have been admitted. But the chief Alteration has been in the Omission of those occasional Asperities of Remark, which, as the Author is now fully convinced, are absolutely foreign to Subjects of
Taste,

Taste, and inconsistent with the Principles of liberal Criticism. Where these Asperities are directed against those who have themselves transgressed in the same Manner, it is indeed no more than literary Retaliation ; and in this Mode even a Warburton has not failed to receive his Deserts, But where on Subjects of a higher Nature—political, moral, or religious—any Persons fancy themselves authorized to assume a Tone of Arrogance and Intolerance ; to insinuate not only that all Wisdom, but all Knowledge and all Virtue are confined to them, and will die with them ; when they presume to treat all who differ from them as a Sort of Delinquents standing at their Bar, and upon whom they scruple not to pass Sentence without Judgment and without Mercy, no Language can be too strong to express the Energies of indignant Resentment and ineffable Contempt. And in this Point of View there are no Essays which the Author of the present Volumes has revised with more Satisfaction, than those which contain such Observations as occurred to him in perusing the more than Papal Denunciations and Decretals of Soame Jenyns and Edmund Burke.

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ESSAYS

PHILOSOPHICAL, MORAL, &c. &c.

BOOK I.

ESSAY I.

ON LIBERTY AND NECESSITY.

THE celebrated controversy on the subject of Liberty and Necessity has from the earliest ages, and in various modes, attracted the attention and employed the sagacity of philosophical and speculative minds. Whether the course of human events is fixed and unalterable, or uncertain and contingent, is a question in the highest degree curious and interesting; but at the same time involved in difficulties of such magnitude, that it may be justly doubted whether it is capable of a solution so clear and satisfactory, as to preclude a difference of opinion on this subject amongst enquirers equally candid, impartial and intelligent. In modern times indeed the con-

troverſy has aſſumed a more regular and ſcientific form; and the utmoſt force of the human underſtanding has been exerted, the utmoſt powers of ratiocination diſplayed by the advocates on each ſide, in their attempts to eſtabliſh or confirm their reſpective ſystems. Yet the queſtion does not ſeem to approach to a deciſion, and the greateſt names in the republic of letters are ſtill divided in opinion on this important point.

Fiſt, the Neceſſarian Writers—amongſt whom Hume, Hobbes, Collins, Leibnitz, Hutcheſon, Edwards, Hartley, Prieſtley, and perhaps Locke, are to be claſſed—ſtrenuouſly maintain, that the courſe of human events is abſolutely fixed and unalterable; and that nothing could poſſibly, or at leaſt without a change in the fundamental laws of the univerſe, take place otherwiſe than as it is, has been or is to be. This they affirm is not merely a probable concluſion, but a concluſion demonſtrably reſulting from the following conſiderations. Whatever begins to exiſt muſt have an adequate cauſe of its exiſtence; for if the ſmalleſt particle of duſt, or the moſt tranſient emotion of the mind, could come into exiſtence without a cauſe, it is evident that the whole univerſe and all the inhabitants it contains might alſo exiſt without a cauſe: and conſequently it would be impoſſible to prove the exiſtence of
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the great and original Cause of all things. This primary truth then being established, they assert further, that the same causes in the same circumstances must produce exactly the same effects: this axiom being consonant to all the phænomena of nature, and indeed the basis and foundation of all just philosophy. To affirm that the same causes do not in the same circumstances produce invariably the same effects, is in reality to assert that a cause of existence is not absolutely necessary. For if nothing in the cause corresponds to the variation in the effect, that variation exists without a cause: consequently this truth is equally incontrovertible with the first. And they proceed with confidence to a third proposition, necessarily resulting from the two former, viz. that a man in any given situation must form certain or definite volitions or determinations. For if nothing exists without a cause, and the same causes in the same circumstances produce the same effects, the volitions referred to must have had a cause, and the cause which was adequate to the production of those volitions was inadequate to the production of any other than those; for a variation in the volitions would necessarily imply a variation in the cause. Hence it follows by easy and irrefragable deduction, that in every possible situation in which a human or thinking being can be placed, his volitions must be de-

terminate and certain; that the volitions of all mankind are so; and finally, that as every event comes to pass in consequence of causes previously existing, the whole series of events is under the influence of an absolute and uncontrollable Necessity.

Again, it is urged as an undeniable matter of fact by this class of metaphysicians, that no volition ever takes place in the mind, without some motive. As this proposition is too plain to be called in question, it must be allowed that when different motives present themselves to the imagination, the mind will be invariably influenced by the stronger motive: consequently the volition must be in the strictest sense necessary.

The prescience of the Divine Being affords also a collateral argument of the greatest weight in support of the doctrine of Necessity. For if future events are in their own nature uncertain and contingent, Omniscience itself cannot see them to be otherwise than they actually are; and it is a gross and palpable contradiction to assert, that God can with absolute certainty foretel that a particular event shall take place; and at the same time to affirm, that the event foretold depends upon the free-will of man for its accomplishment, if the determinations of the will are themselves lawless and uncertain.

To these very powerful and cogent arguments the advocates for Philosophical Liberty, viz. Clarke, Beattie, Butler, Price, Law, Bryant, Wollaston, Horsley, &c. reply to the following purpose. As all mankind have an internal consciousness of freedom, and as it is impossible for any metaphysical subtleties so totally to overpower the original and genuine dictates of nature, as to excite a real belief in the mind of any rational being that he is not master of his own actions, but that he is a mere machine, and as incapable of controlling the events of this life or the determinations of his will, as a puppet to resist the impulse of the wires by which he is put in motion, it might seem sufficient to appeal to common sense for the refutation of assertions so extravagant and absurd. But in order more completely to expose the fallacy and detect the sophistry of those arguments by which their antagonists attempt to reason men out of their reason, it is proper, say they, to enter into a more full and accurate investigation of them. And with respect to the so much boasted argument from the necessary operation of causes and effects, they profess their readiness to acknowledge the necessity of a cause to the production of any effect; but they can by no means admit the application of this axiom to the support of the hypothesis in question, nor by any means allow that motives

are to be considered as the efficient causes of volition. The man alone is the agent, and forms the volition, upon the view and consideration of motives indeed which may be, and usually are, the occasion of the volition, but which cannot with any degree of propriety be stiled the impellers, or the true and physical causes of it. To set this proposition in a clearer light they observe, that amongst other wonderful and incomprehensible powers with which it has pleased God to endow the human mind, is the faculty of self-determination of beginning motion, of putting itself in action. And though no reasonable person will exert this power in a total disregard to motives, yet must the power indisputably be allowed to exist independent of the motive; and though two different volitions be supposed to take place in the same precise situation, they cannot surely with any shadow of justice be represented as existing without any adequate cause, when the self-determining power is itself the cause of each volition.

In various instances the different motives presented to the mind appear equally forcible. At other times we cannot, with the utmost attention, perceive our minds to be influenced, previous to the act of chusing, by any motive whatever to a definite choice. In such cases, can any one be so absurd as to imagine that the man is not at liberty

liberty to act at all? Has not a man a power of walking, because he is not incited by any particular motive to turn either to the right hand or to the left? Or is a traveller incapable of proceeding to the place of his destination, till he has formally considered and decided whether the shorter and rougher or the farther and easier road be the more eligible? No: doubtless he has a power of instant determination, notwithstanding the impossibility of ascertaining the preponderance or even the existence of any motive which could in any manner influence the volition. Even in those cases where the preponderance of any motive is visible and notorious, no man can truly say that the action consequent upon it was strictly speaking *necessary*; for great as the weight of the motive may be supposed, if it was not actually of a violent or compulsive kind, the self-determining power might have decided in opposition to that or any other motive whatever. So that the weakness and fallacy of that reasoning must be apparent to every unprejudiced enquirer, by which it is pretended that the mind will be necessarily and invariably influenced by the strongest motive.

In the multifarious and eventful business of life, it perpetually happens that the mind is agitated and perplexed by a conflict of opposite and contending motives; and we too frequently find

virtue and reason ranged on one side, passion and inclination on the other. In this unhappy situation what is to be done? Are men quietly and passively to submit to the strong and violent impulse of passion, and refuse to listen to the still and feeble call of reason? No: they must exert their own inherent power of self-determination; and form their resolutions, in spite of the superior force of those inclinations which they know to be highly culpable and unworthy. If it is sufficient to say in vindication of a vicious action, that the motives which influenced us to the perpetration of it were at the time predominant in the mind, no villany could ever want an adequate apology, the very foundations of virtue would be subverted, the ideas of virtue and vice would be totally confounded, and the moral character of the Deity himself, as the author of a constitution of things which necessarily and inevitably led to the commission of every species of immorality, would be highly reflected upon, and most injuriously, not to say profanely traduced and misrepresented.

And in regard to the collateral argument deduced from the Divine Prescience, it may be said in the language of Scripture, that as the Heavens are high above the Earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts: and it would be most unreasonable

able and presumptuous to expect that men should be able to comprehend or explain the mode in which the Divine attributes exist or operate. We know by intuition as well as induction, that the will of man is free : and we know from the accomplishment of Prophecies, as well as by the express claims and declarations of the Divine Being, that all futurity lies open to his immense survey. And these truths, if separately proved, must undoubtedly be consistent with each other, however inconsistent or irreconcilable they may appear to our weak and limited capacities. But even if it should be allowed that the free-will of man, and the fore-knowledge of Deity, when understood in its utmost latitude, are express contradictions, it would surely be much less derogatory to the honor and glory of Almighty God to acknowledge, that the attribute of prescience is not absolutely and strictly speaking without limitation, than to assert the existence of it in such a sense, as to imply the impossibility of imparting to man freedom of agency, the glorious and inestimable privilege of self-determination. If it is in the nature of things impossible that the attribute of prescience can subsist in its fullest extent without depriving men of that faculty which can alone render them moral or accountable agents ; with profound submission and reverence we may venture to affirm, that

that in this sense, and to this extent, it does not subsist: though doubtless that Almighty Being, to whom all hearts are open and all desires known, cannot fail to judge with a degree of precision, to us wholly incomprehensible, concerning the effects which will arise from causes actually existing. His foresight extends to every possible contingency, and his power and wisdom will infallibly make every event subservient to the most glorious and salutary purposes.

The Necessarians, far from being silenced by these popular reasonings, with great ardour and confidence thus resume the argument:—"It is acknowledged by our opponents, then, that nothing can come into existence without a cause. All the affections, emotions, and feelings of the mind, however modified, and however distinguished, are the real and genuine effects of some real and adequate cause. The question therefore to be decided is this:—'Whether those mental affections are produced by a regular concatenation of circumstances or motives, operating as real and adequate causes, or whether they are the result of a certain faculty of the mind, fortunately discovered for this very purpose, and dignified with the appellation of the self-determining power.'" He who affirms that the self-determining power is the cause of volition, must doubtless intend to convey some farther

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ther idea, than that the power by which our volitions are determined is the cause of volition; for this is a mere identical proposition, which can never be seriously proposed as the subject of philosophical discussion. By the self-determining power therefore must be meant, if indeed it has any meaning, either the actual exertion of volition, or the mental energy which precedes volition, and which is the efficient cause of it. If it means the actual exertion of volition, then the assertors of this power evidently confound the cause with the effect, making the act of volition prior to itself, distinct from itself, and the cause of itself. But if it means the mental energy, preceding and producing volition, it is then plainly equivalent to the term *motive*, and the question is reduced to a mere verbal controversy. For this mental energy, denoting only a particular disposition and state of mind, must itself have resulted from a previous disposition of mind, as likewise that previous disposition from one yet more remote. A regular and uninterrupted concatenation of volitions, thus extending itself backwards to the original source of agency, each volition or mental state, like wave impelling wave, arising from preceding, and giving rise to succeeding states, or definite situations of mind analogous to itself, and corresponding to those immutable laws by which the mental, no less

less than the material world, is governed by infinite wisdom and power. But the term *motive*, according to the Necessarian definition, includes all those previous circumstances which contribute to produce a definite volition or determination of the will. To what purpose then attempt to distinguish between the power and the motive of determination, when the ideas precisely coincide; the definite cause of a definite volition being all which is really meant by either? Or where is the difference between the Libertarian, who says that the mind chuses the motive, and the Necessarian, who asserts, that the motive determines the mind, if the volition be the necessary result of all the previous circumstances? The distinction in this case can only amount to an idle and trifling evasion: and it is evident, that in order to preserve a shadow of liberty, its advocates make no scruple to adopt a gross impropriety of expression. To boast that the mind chuses the motive when the mind is restricted to a definite choice, is ridiculous; and it is in fact as great a solecism, as to affirm that the volition chuses the motive. For the choice of the mind is not prior but subsequent to the motive: it is therefore not the cause but the effect of the motive; and this pretended mental choice is manifestly neither more nor less than the necessary determination of volition.

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After this, it is needless to enlarge upon the absurdity of the idea, that this pretended power of self-determination is capable of deciding in contradiction to the most powerful motive. For if it is considered as the real and proper cause of volition, its decisions must be definite and certain, and it is perfectly ridiculous to apply the term, most powerful, to that motive which is not actually prevalent. Admitting, however, for the sake of argument, the existence of a power in the mind, the reality of which, as distinguished from the power of motives, it is impossible to distinguish by even the shadow of a proof, it is evident it can exist only as the cause of volition in general; for so far as it is not biased and influenced by motives, so far it bears an exactly equal relation to each particular volition, and therefore cannot possibly be the cause of any specific determination; just as matter endowed with a similar power of self-motion would remain for ever inert, in consequence of its possessing an equal tendency to move in every possible direction at the same instant of time. So far as it is an independent principle, therefore, it is a nugatory and useless one. But even if it could be proved the true and proper cause of every particular volition, still we insist that the volitions produced by it must be certain and definite; for it will ever remain an incontrovertible axiom, notwithstanding

ing all metaphysical refinements and subtleties, that the same cause in the same precise circumstances must inevitably produce the same effects.

To appeal to the internal feelings and consciousness of mankind, as the advocates for liberty affect to do in confirmation of their principles, will avail them little. The only species of liberty that any man is, or can be conscious of, is a liberty or power of voluntary agency, or of acting as he pleases or wills: and this is a power which we are so far from contesting, that we consider it as an essential part of the Necessarian System. The fact is, that the question so much contested among philosophers, viz. *whether volitions are definite in definite circumstances*, never occurs to the generality of mankind, and if it were stated would not be understood. To philosophers only, then, let the appeal be made, and surely every attentive and impartial examiner must be compelled to answer in the affirmative.

As to the immoral and pernicious consequences which our adversaries pretend to deduce from Necessarian principles, it is easy to show that they are founded in a gross misapprehension of their nature and tendency. The philosophical idea of liberty will not indeed be included in the Necessarian definition of virtue, but it will still remain as distinct from, and opposite to vice, as excellent in itself and as much the object of
love

love and admiration, as it can possibly be upon any hypothesis whatever. To incite us to the practice of it, and to deter us from the commission of vice, motives must, agreeably to the frame and constitution of the human mind, be held out to our view: peace and happiness be annexed to the one, shame and misery to the other. These associations once implanted in the mind must produce the most beneficial effects. And the importance of early inculcating just sentiments, and of urging men to the practice of virtue by every laudable motive, cannot appear in so striking and important a light upon any other ground, as on that which ascribes to them a certain and invariable operation.

That objection to the doctrine of Necessity, which charges it with involving the character of the Supreme Being in the guilt of moral turpitude, is an accusation equally weak and ill founded. If the Deity acts immorally in decreeing vicious actions, how can our adversaries, upon their own principles, vindicate God's moral government, in permitting those irregularities which he could so easily have prevented? The truth is, the difficulty is the very same on each, and indeed every hypothesis; and the Necessitarians are under no peculiar obligation to solve that great problem, the introduction of evil into the universe. However, as we have the
 most

most convincing proofs, derived both from reason and Revelation, of the moral attributes of the Deity, we may surely rest satisfied that very wise and important ends are to be answered by it; and we may safely conclude that all things shall terminate in pure and perfect happiness; and that the power, wisdom, and goodness of God shall be at length fully displayed and illustriously vindicated.

It is farther observable, that the consequences flowing from the system of Necessity, and which appear to the assertors of free-will so alarming and dreadful, are light and trivial when compared with those which must necessarily result from the denial of the Divine prescience; which may be said to wrest the sceptre from the hand of the Creator, and to place that capricious and undefinable principle, the self-determining power of man, upon the throne of the universe. If the absolute fore-knowledge of God is admitted, every one must see that Contingency is excluded; and consequently the whole fabric reared upon the shallow and visionary basis of man's free-agency must instantly dissolve, "and, like an insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a wreck behind."

ESSAY II.

REMARKS ON THE XXIst CHAPTER OF LOCKE'S
ESSAY ON HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

PERHAPS no writer can be named, of ancient or of modern times, to whom mankind are under more extensive obligation than Mr. Locke. By his Essay on Human Understanding he effected what may well be called, a complete revolution of opinion in metaphysics. Metaphysics, which had so long and so justly lain under the reproach of bewildering the understanding in a maze of words, destitute of real meaning—metaphysics, which had so long discoursed in an unintelligible jargon, became in the hands of Mr. Locke a most interesting and important branch of true philosophy. By his Treatises on Government and Toleration, he fixed the civil and religious rights of mankind upon a firm and immoveable basis: and in his theological works he exhibited the Reasonableness of Christianity, and the solidity of the evidence on which our holy religion is founded, in a clear, perspicuous, and convincing point of view. The name and the memory of that great man are justly held

in the highest veneration. Whenever, therefore, an error in the writings of a person of such distinguished eminence can be discerned, it calls the more loudly for animadversion, in order to prevent its acquiring a sanction from the reputation of its author. This is the only apology necessary for hazarding a few observations upon that celebrated chapter of Mr. Locke's Essay which treats of Power, so far as relates to his representation of the nature of the human will, and of the liberty or necessity of human actions.

The clearness and precision of Mr. Locke's ideas on those various subjects which he has undertaken to discuss are for the most part such, that one cannot but be astonished at the obscurity and perplexity in which this interesting topic, under his management of it, seems involved: and it is impossible to point out a more striking contrast than this chapter on Power by Mr. Locke forms, to the "View of Philosophical Necessity" by Dr. Hartley, which may be regarded as a master-piece of composition; and from which it is evident, that the most profound reasonings never need to lose sight of those indispensable requisites of good writing, conciseness, simplicity, and perspicuity. Mr. Locke seems to have entered upon the investigation of this celebrated question with reluctance; and perhaps deviated into obscurity and inconsistency
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in treating upon it, from an apprehension of incurring the odium of favouring the philosophical system of Mr. Hobbes, who had some years before very ably defended the hypothesis of Philosophical Necessity in an express treatise upon the subject, and who was probably himself in no small degree indebted for his accurate knowledge of it to the writings of Spinoza.

The free-agency of man may be considered in two different points of view, either popular or philosophical. In the popular sense it is unquestionably true; in the philosophical sense it is demonstrably false. But Mr. Locke obviously confounds these two different views of the subject; and though he admits all the premises from which the conclusions in favor of Philosophical Necessity are deduced, he refuses to acknowledge the justness of those conclusions, because there is a practical sense perfectly consistent with the hypothesis of moral necessity, in which men may be considered as free agents. "LIBERTY," says Mr. Locke, Sect. 8, "is a power in any agent to do or to forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind." This definition is consonant to the popular view of the subject; and it may be called Practical Liberty, which no philosopher ever pretended to call in question. Metaphysical Liberty is a power of forming opposite determina-

tions in the same precise situation. A man in any given circumstances may undoubtedly act as he wills or pleases; but then the act, whatever it be, is a definite act, and in the same precise previous circumstances the same act would invariably take place. For the act results from the previous circumstances, and perfect uniformity in the cause must produce perfect uniformity in the effect. Whatever the ignorant or the vulgar may fancy; therefore, throughout the entire series of causes and effects, nothing could possibly have happened different from what has actually taken place. The course of events is fixed and immutable, and thoughts, volitions, and actions, proceed in one uninterrupted concatenation from the beginning to the end of time, agreeably to the laws originally established by the great Creator: and it is as impossible to disturb the regular progression of causes and effects in the mental as in the material world. A river may as soon be made to flow back to its fountain, as volitions can be exempted from the necessitating influence of motives.

Mr. Locke farther tells us, and very justly, Sect. 2, “ that voluntary is not opposed to necessary, but to involuntary:” or in other words, that there is no real contrariety in the ideas conveyed by the terms voluntary and necessary, but that they may both be predicated of the same action.

action. A man is said to act voluntarily when he is under no external constraint; but though he acts voluntarily, he may and must act necessarily, if the action is determined by motives previously existing in his own breast. A man, of a charitable disposition, for instance, bestows a benefaction for the relief of some indigent object in distress: the act is no doubt voluntary, but it is likewise strictly speaking necessary: for in the precise situation of mind in which the gift was bestowed, he was irresistibly influenced by motives of generosity to confer this donation. But it may be said, he could have withheld it if he had pleased. No doubt he could: but the question is, how he could have pleased to withhold his benefaction at the very moment in which he was pleased to bestow it? So far then Mr. Locke maintains nothing inconsistent with the principles of Philosophical Necessity: nay, he makes the same distinctions, and defends them in the same manner that the Necessitarians themselves are accustomed to do.

Again Mr. Locke observes, Sect. 13, "that where the power to act or forbear according to the direction of thought is wanting, there Necessity takes place." Most certainly it does. In that case even Popular Liberty is wanting. But Philosophical Necessity may take place, where the power to act or forbear according to the di-

rection of the thought is not wanting. In any given or definite situation of mind, we may either act or forbear to act as we please. This all allow: but in the same situation of mind we cannot do both. If in the first instance I determine to act, let me be placed precisely in the same situation once more, and I must inevitably form the same determination, as upon the contrary supposition the determination not to act must be equally limited and definite. When we say, with a reference to any particular case, a man has power to act or to forbear as he pleases, &c. there is in fact no uncertainty in the nature of the thing; and the seeming uncertainty implied in the expression denotes only our own ignorance of the event. The place in which a billiard-ball must finally rest after being struck is necessarily determined by the laws of motion, though if it is not obstructed by any external impediment, we say in common language that it is at *liberty* to settle upon any part of the billiard table.

“ If this be so,” continues Mr. Locke, Sect. 14, “ I leave it to be considered, whether it may not help to put an end to that long agitated and unreasonable, because unintelligible question, whether man’s will be free or no? It is as insignificant to ask whether man’s will be free, as to ask whether his sleep be swift or his virtue square? Liberty being as little applicable to the will

will as motion to sleep, or figure to virtue. Liberty is a power which can belong only to agents, and cannot be an attribute of the will, which is also but a power." Now it is obvious to remark, that it is one thing to object to the discussion of a question as insignificant in itself, and another to object to a particular statement of it as inaccurate or improper. By the question "Whether the will be free?" was and still is universally understood, whether the man or intelligent agent be free in willing or in forming volitions. And the advocates for Philosophical Liberty do not pretend that the will is free, as contradistinguished from the agent willing. To the question then, "Whether a man be free?" Mr. Locke, Sect. 24, answers to the same effect as before, "that a man is as free as it is possible for freedom to make him, who possesses the power of acting or not acting by the determination of his own thoughts: for how," says he, "can we think any one freer, than to have the power to do what he will?" True; so say the Necessarians; but they maintain that this is perfectly consistent with their grand axiom, that "volitions must be definite in definite circumstances." "But," says Mr. Locke, "freedom, unless it reaches farther than this, will not serve the turn. Concerning human liberty, therefore, this question is farther raised, Whether a man be free to will? which

I think," says he, "is what is meant, when it is disputed whether the will be free." No doubt it is; and this proves with how little justice he represents it as an unintelligible question. "As to that he replies, a man in respect of willing *cannot be free*: for liberty consisting in a power to act or not to act, it is absolutely necessary in any supposed case that he prefer the one to the other, upon which preference or volition the action or its forbearance certainly follows."—This, without doubt, is perfectly consonant to the principles of Philosophical Necessity. Nay, this argument is always urged by the advocates of that hypothesis as irrefragable. For the action, as Mr. Locke observes, certainly following the volition, and volitions being founded upon previous ideas of preference from precisely similar situations of mind, volitions and actions precisely similar must inevitably result.

"But the next thing demanded," says Mr. Locke, Sect. 25, "is, whether a man be at liberty to will which of the two he pleases, motion or rest? A question of which the absurdity is manifest. It is to ask whether a man can will what he wills, or be pleased ~~with~~ what he is pleased with? A question ~~which~~ needs no answer." True, and it is a question, therefore, which Mr. Locke might have spared himself the trouble of proposing. It is self-evident that man
has

has the liberty, or rather the power, to will that which he pleases or wills. And all that the Necessarians pretend is, that man has not the liberty or power of willing that which he does not please or will. "In this, then," he repeats, Sect. 28, "consists freedom, in our being able to act or not to act, according as we shall chuse or will." Thus far, then, Mr. Locke coincides with the advocates for Philosophical Necessity, though his concessions are generally involved in a cloud of words: and he is still desirous, as it should seem, of ranking amongst the friends of Philosophical Liberty.

Allowing our actions to be necessarily determined by our volitions, **he** now goes on to ask, Sect 29, "What **determines** the will?" To which he answers, "the mind, or the intelligent agent itself, exerting its power this or that particular way: or, more explicitly, the mind is determined by motives grounded upon feelings of satisfaction or uneasiness." This account is entirely consistent with the system of Necessity; for the advocates of that system insist as strongly as Mr. Locke, that our actions are the result of our volitions, which are themselves produced by motives, or by the mind actuated by a regard to motives; and as those motives were themselves produced by causes previously existing, it follows, that motives, volitions, and actions, are all
the

the definite effects of definite causes, and that they are all links of that

————— “Golden, everlasting chain,
Whose strong embrace holds heaven, and earth, and main.”

The powers possessed by all the different ranks and orders of beings in the universe, resulting mediately or immediately from the infinite source of existence and energy, must be considered both as definite effects produced by a definite cause, and also as definite causes producing definite effects. Whether we contemplate the natural or the moral world, every thing appears the result of an exertion of divine power, and it is precisely that result which that exertion was calculated and intended to produce. A principle which, all previous circumstances remaining the same, can produce either of two opposite effects is no cause at all; for the very essence of a cause, so far as we are capable of comprehending its nature, consists in the inseparability of its connection with the effect actually produced. There is no other intelligible or possible definition of a cause; but this definition entirely and completely demolishes from its basis the fabric of metaphysical liberty.

It hath been sufficiently demonstrated that Mr. Locke's principles respecting human agency did not in reality differ from those of Hartley, Leibnitz,

nitz, Collins, &c. and that, in order to have been consistent, he ought to have avowed himself a believer in the doctrine of Philosophical Necessity. But this, as it seems, he was previously determined against: and a very extraordinary expedient, it must be owned, he has discovered to serve as a salvo for his reputation in this critical dilemma. "It is natural," says he, Sect. 47, "to suppose that the greatest and most pressing uneasiness or motive should determine the will to the next action: and so it does for the most part, but not always: for the mind has a power to suspend the execution of its desires, is at liberty to consider, examine, and weigh them: and in this lies the liberty that man has. This seems to me the source of all liberty: and in this seems to consist what is improperly styled free-will." Sect 52, "This is the hinge on which turns the liberty of intellectual beings. All the liberty of which men are capable lies in this, that they can suspend their desires; all we can do is to hold our wills undetermined till we have examined the good and evil of what we desire. What follows after that, follows in a chain of consequences linked one to another, &c. &c." Now if Mr. Locke had been writing a treatise of practical morality, he would doubtless have done well in laying a chief stress on the power we have of suspending our determinations. Who
among

among the advocates of Necessity is inclined to call it in question? Who among them is not, upon proper occasions, disposed to urge men to the practice of it? But that Mr. Locke should introduce it into a philosophical work, and should fancy that he had established the hypothesis of philosophical liberty, merely by proving that man has a power of suspending his volitions, is not a little astonishing. "Volitions," says Mr. Locke, "are determined by motives." "Of course therefore," say the Necessarians, "the strongest motive must determine the volition." "For the most part," replies Mr. Locke, "it does so, but not always; for the mind has a power to suspend its determinations, to weigh, examine, and deliberate before it finally resolves, &c." Who denies all this? But surely a degree of sagacity far inferior to that possessed by Mr. Locke might suffice to convince us, that a determination to suspend a volition is a mental act no less real than the final determination itself; that it is subject to the same laws, and can no more be produced without a motive than any other volition. We are no less actuated by motives, and no less determined by the strongest motive, when we form a resolution to deliberate or to suspend our final judgment, than in respect to the ultimate decision itself. And to pretend that we are ever influenced by the weaker motive

tive to reject the stronger, is an absurdity almost too gross for refutation. If we determine to act, there must be some motive influencing the determination. On the other hand, if we determine not to act, or to suspend action, the determination must likewise be founded on some motive, which so long as it influences the volition is the predominant, that is, the strongest motive.

Of what advantage then to the Anti-necessarian hypothesis is this boasted power of suspension? It is a power perfectly analogous to all the other powers of the human mind—a power which cannot be exerted independently of motives: and so far as it is the result of motives, the Necessarians are far from calling in question its reality; and they are as well convinced as Mr. Locke of its utility. The inconsistency of Mr. Locke upon this subject is very remarkable: he repeatedly tells us, and truly tells us, that liberty consists only in a power of acting or forbearing to act; but upon re-considering his own assertions, he is apparently alarmed at the coincidence of his system with that of certain unpopular writers, and he must therefore find or make a difference, or at least a distinction between them. So after much obscure and useless prefatory matter, he retracts what he had before positively affirmed, and informs us, that

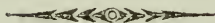
Liberty

Liberty consists in the power of suspending our volitions. One might reasonably suppose that this power was included in the power of forbearing to act; but we are told there is a very important distinction between them. For the power of forbearance cannot be exercised but in consequence of the prevalence of some motive, but the power of suspension may it seems be exerted in direct opposition to the prevailing motive. Surely the hypothesis of Philosophical Liberty never had a more imbecile advocate! His conduct can be accounted for only on the supposition, that he had himself imbibed a great share of the popular dread and abhorrence of the system of Necessity on account of its imaginary pernicious consequences. But it is evident that the doctrine of Necessity cannot, like the doctrine of Predestination or Fatalism, have any dangerous influence upon the bulk of mankind; for it is perfectly consistent with the popular ideas of liberty, with the use of human endeavors, of promises, threatenings, exhortations, rewards and punishments. The liberty of doing as they please is the only liberty which mankind in general can ever be brought to comprehend, so that the doctrine of Philosophical Liberty, if true, as to them is useless; and it must be allowed also upon the same grounds, that the doctrine of Philosophical Necessity,

sity,

erty, if true, is as to them perfectly harmless. But to those who are capable of investigating the question, and who are induced by arguments of which they really comprehend the force to embrace this opinion, it is not only harmless, but highly beneficial. It opens new and extensive views of the divine government and administration: it enforces reverence to God and benevolence to man by motives irresistibly powerful: it excites the most animating expectations of a happy termination of all those mournful and calamitous scenes with which we are at present surrounded; and exhibits to our intellectual view a glorious however distant prospect of a state, in which, to use the beautiful prophetic language of holy writ, “ God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away, and behold! all things are become new.”

ESSAY III.
ON CHRISTIANITY.



SECT. I.

THE critical and interesting situation in which mankind are placed naturally prompts them to a thousand different enquiries and investigations, which are either immediately or remotely connected with that regard to our own happiness, which is the grand spring of all our actions. Of these it must be acknowledged, that no one can merit a greater degree of attention than the question respecting the truth of the Christian religion. The life of man is so short and transient, and the evidence which reason affords of a continuation or renovation of our thinking powers in another state so feeble and defective, that the authenticity of a religion, the fundamental article of which is a general resurrection to an immortal life, is a matter of the utmost moment and consequence. Many other religions there are indeed in the world, which make similar pretences to a divine original ;

original; but they include in them such gross and palpable violations of sense and consistency, and are so totally unaccompanied by any kind of evidence, that they scarcely demand or admit of a formal refutation. Christianity alone, of all the various religions of the universe which advance these supernatural claims, can ever attract the serious regard of an intelligent and enlightened mind; and though very plausible and specious, nay though very subtle and cogent objections have been urged against this religion, it must be admitted by the ingenuous and candid infidel himself, that it is supported by an appearance at least of proof sufficient to perplex, if not to satisfy the judgment; to confound, if not to convince the understanding.

It is however undeniable, that many of the greatest geniuses which the world has ever produced, in the most enlightened age which that world has ever known, and in a country where freedom of enquiry has been pursued to the utmost possible extent, have not scrupled to avow their firm persuasion of the truth of this religion, and of the force and sufficiency of that evidence by which it is supported. Is it necessary to mention the illustrious names of NEWTON, LOCKE, MILTON, BACON, BOYLE, CLARKE, ADDISON, or HARTLEY, in proof of this assertion? Will any one venture to object to the

competency of the judges? Are they deficient in knowledge, in understanding, or impartiality? Or can they be accused of giving only a slight and cursory attention to the subject? No: in such minds a firm and permanent conviction can be the result of nothing less than a full and accurate investigation, of which their writings afford ample proof. Why then should such writers as Hume, Gibbon, or Voltaire, by a mode of warfare unworthy of their talents, attack by artful insinuations, contemptuous sneers, or ambiguous inuendoes, that religion, which not only permits, but dares and invites the closest scrutiny? Declining these disingenuous artifices, calculated to make impression only on weak minds, let them produce their "strong reasons," that they may be fairly and deliberately weighed in the golden balance in truth.

It is the object of the present Essay, 1st, Concisely to state a few of the leading arguments in favor of Christianity: 2d, To consider some of the more plausible objections to which it seems liable; and, Lastly, to offer such general remarks as may present themselves on its genius and spirit.

It is to be presumed that no one will be sceptical enough to dispute, that in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius a very eminent and extraordinary person was born and flourished in
Judea,

Judea, who laid claim to divine communications, who was the founder of a religious sect or society, and who suffered crucifixion under the government of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator. This being premised, we are to consider upon what authority the disciples and followers of Jesus, the person here described, asserted that he was what he himself professed to be, viz. a prophet sent from God. And if we call in question the truth of their testimony, we have our choice of this alternative—either they were dupes or impostors; either they were deceived themselves, or the intentional deceivers of others. In vain do infidels exclaim, that this is an alternative applicable to all the religions that ever existed upon the earth, and that they are under no obligation to ascertain the exact proportions of knavery and folly of which this or any other religion may be compounded. Of other religions, indeed, the knavery and folly are fully apparent; nor is it material to determine how far the one or the other may predominate; but with respect to Christianity, not the most distant symptom appears of either; and this provoking and perplexing dilemma still remains, and must ever remain in full force and vigour. It cannot be pretended that the Apostles and Evangelists were imposed upon, with regard to those facts which compose the substance of

their histories. However gross their education or their understandings may be represented, and however strong the delusions of ignorance and folly may in some cases be, it was totally impossible for them, if they were not absolutely insane, to suppose that they saw the blind restored to sight, the deaf to hearing, the dumb to speech, the sick to health, and even the dead to life, if no such events took place. And least of all is it possible they should believe, that Christ himself appeared to them three days after his public crucifixion, death and burial; that they maintained a social and friendly intercourse with him for forty days after his resurrection, and that they were afterwards eye-witnesses of his ascension to Heaven, if these things were not really so. In a word, this branch of the alternative is so glaringly and monstrously absurd, that no man in his senses can consider it as capable of being defended; so that it may safely be pronounced, that if Christianity be an imposture, the Apostles themselves were parties in that imposture, and guilty of inventing a fraudulent scheme, and of imposing upon the credulity and weakness of mankind. But this supposition is clogged with such insuperable difficulties, that it seems scarcely more tenable than the former. The enquiry that most obviously presents itself on this occasion is, what motive could they have for
this

this extraordinary attempt? As to Christ himself, it appears that he made from the first his own sufferings and death an essential part of his plan; differing in this at least from all other impostors that have ever appeared in the world: and after that event had taken place, his disciples and followers renounced all selfish considerations, sacrificed all their temporal prospects for the sake of that religion which, according to this hypothesis, they knew to be false; which subjected them to numberless calamities; which was wholly destitute of evidence, and which therefore they laboured to propagate with scarcely a possibility of success; which was attended with ridicule, disgrace, difficulty and danger; but to which they were so much attached, that they scrupled not to lay down their lives with composure, nay with alacrity and triumph, in support of it; and upon every occasion to seal their testimony with their blood. Can we suppose that a being so constituted as man should act a part so opposite to all his natural feelings, sentiments and passions? For every effect there must certainly be an adequate cause: but who will pretend to assign any probable or possible cause for a conduct so absurd, so unnatural, so unaccountable? Well might the poet exclaim,

Whence but from Heaven could men unskill'd in arts,
In different nations born, in different parts,

Weave such agreeing truths? Or how, or why
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?

Unask'd their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gains, and martyrdom their price?

DRYDEN.

But a still more extraordinary circumstance, if possible, is, that notwithstanding men were deterred by every conceivable motive from embracing this religion; notwithstanding the manifold dangers and difficulties attending a public profession of it; notwithstanding its total defect in point of evidence, converts were every day added to the number of Christ's disciples, and in a few years symptoms appeared of a speedy and general diffusion of Christianity over all the provinces of the Roman empire. In the absence of other and better proof, the Apostles had the weakness and imprudence—such is the language of infidelity—to appeal to certain ancient predictions, which, as they pretended, had now received their accomplishment: they had the unparalleled assurance to rest the truth of their religion upon recent miracles performed by Christ in the presence of all the people of Judea, but for which, excepting themselves, not a single voucher could be found; and upon their own assertion, which after such convincing proof of their frenzy and extravagance, one would imagine was not likely to obtain much credit, that

Jesus

Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. Here then is another inexplicable phænomenon: for who is the man competent to explain how Christianity in such circumstances could make any degree of progress in the world, much less how such numbers of intelligent and reflecting persons should be induced to embrace it? A late celebrated historian has indeed attempted to account for this astonishing fact upon natural principles; but it is obvious to remark, that the causes he enumerates imply a previous state of things, in which a firm faith in Christianity prevailed amongst the professors of it. This faith must have originated in evidence of some kind or other; and the grand difficulty still remains unsolved, what that evidence was, and upon what foundation that faith rested. Let Mr. Gibbon ascribe whatever influence he pleases to his secondary causes, he must as a philosopher allow us to consider those causes as themselves produced by some preceding cause. And it is for him to repel the inference, that the truth of Christianity will better account for the existence of those causes than the falsehood of it. What progress, it may be asked, would Mahomedanism have made in that enlightened age, unconnected with motives of ambition or interest, trusting entirely to its own evidence for success, and proposing that evidence under every possible

disadvantage? Under such circumstances, the intemperate zeal of the Professors, together with all the terrible threats and magnificent promises of the Koran, would doubtless have made little impression on the minds of thinking and intelligent persons, who would easily discover, if called upon to investigate, the extreme weakness and futility of its lofty pretensions. The doctrine of a future state, it has been well observed, was not a novelty first promulgated by Christ; it was the doctrine of Plato and of Socrates 500 years previous to his incarnation. Why then did it not produce equal conviction? For this reason only, because it was not attended with equal evidence.

It will next be proper concisely to exhibit the argument from prophecy, on which Christians in general justly place the highest stress, and on which the whole fabric of Christianity depends for support. It is an unquestionable fact, that in certain ancient writings which the Jewish nation had long been accustomed to regard as sacred, plain intimations were given, that a very great and extraordinary person would make his appearance in the world previous to the political subversion of that State. Various circumstances relative to the place of his birth, his family, his character, his office, the events of his life, and the manner of his death are clearly specified. In

Jesus,

Jesus, the Author of the Christian religion, only can it be pretended that these predictions have received their accomplishment, and in him they appear to meet, as the rays of the sun in a focus, with concentrated lustre. The subsequent predictions of Christ himself and his Apostles, particularly the Apostle Paul, describing in the most express and unambiguous language the nature and extent of that grand apostacy which has actually taken place in the Christian church, are such as they imagine must impress conviction on every mind, not previously biassed by the most unreasonable prejudice.

To attempt to traverse this mighty maze would lead to copious disquisition. But there are two considerations connected with the prophetic branch of evidence which it would be wrong wholly to omit. The first is the present state and circumstances of the Jewish nation. The Jewish prophets have unanimously asserted, and Christianity consequently supposes, a general restoration of that people to their own country, where they may again perhaps become the medium of the divine communications to the rest of mankind. Now it must be allowed, that the bare possibility of the fulfilment of a prediction of this nature is itself a most singular and extraordinary circumstance. Two thousand years ago the nation of the Jews, “ a petty Arabian horde,”

horde," as they have been contemptuously stiled, were conquered by the Babylonians, a great and powerful people, and carried far away into captivity. And though it might naturally be expected that they would in process of time have coalesced with their conquerors, and have been ultimately absorbed and annihilated by the union, the fact is that, dispersed and scattered as they have almost ever since been over the face of the globe, they have never perhaps in a single instance, in any country, lost their religious or national distinctions; and they are now generally supposed to be as numerous as before the Babylonian, or as some think even the Assyrian captivity. This is perfectly amazing: it is contrary to all history, and all experience in the course of human affairs in similar cases. It has been boldly and not very hyperbolically stiled a standing miracle. Within a thousand or twelve hundred years back, a great variety of important and extraordinary revolutions have taken place among the nations of Europe. In our own country the Britons were conquered by the Saxons, the Saxons by the Danes, and the Danes and Saxons by the Normans: but in a few centuries these opposite and hostile nations were consolidated into one indistinguishable mass. A part of the British nation indeed, by retiring into an inaccessible and mountainous country, and

secluding

fecluding themselves from the rest of the island, has retained its language and nationality ; but this cannot be looked upon as in any degree analogous to the state of the Jews.

ITALY, about the same time that Britain was subdued by the Saxons, was conquered by the Goths and Vandals. It is not easy to conceive a more striking contrast than that which subsisted between the polished inhabitants of that delightful country and their savage invaders ;* and yet how soon did all distinction cease between them. In France the Roman colonies gradually assimilated with the ancient Gauls ; and in Spain, though the Moriscoes continued for several ages and till their final expulsion a distinct people, after they were once reduced to a state of submission and subjection, their numbers very sensibly

* Oft o'er the trembling nations from afar
 Has Scythia breath'd the living cloud of war ;
 And where the deluge burst with sweepy sway
 Their arms, their Kings, their Gods, were roll'd away.
 As oft have issued, host impelling host,
 The blue-eyed myriads from the Baltic coast.
 The prostrate South to the destroyer yields
 Her boasted titles and her golden fields.
 With grim delight the brood of winter view
 A brighter day, and heav'ns of azure hue :
 Scent the new fragrance of the breathing rose,
 And quaff the pendent vintage as it grows.

GRAY.

sibly diminished; and there is no room to doubt but that they would in course of time have mingled with the general mass. But with regard to the Jews, the wonder is, that though they do not in any country where they are settled bear any proportion to the natural inhabitants; though they are universally reduced to a state of the lowest subjection, and even exposed to hatred, contempt and persecution, yet in no instance does there seem any probability of diminution with respect to their numbers, in no instance do they discover any decay of attachment to their religious principles. The situation of the Jews, therefore, is absolutely without example: but supposing it otherwise, could it be proved that the present condition and circumstances of that people were the subject of clear and express predictions, pronounced two thousand years ago, we must unavoidably suppose the intervention of a sagacity and foresight far above human.

The second observation necessary to be made is this—It is evident from the express declarations of Christ and his Apostles, that Christianity was originally destined, as it is indeed calculated, for an universal religion. This event is the subject of numerous prophecies. Now it is truly remarkable, that the present situation of things in the world is such, that there seems a strong probability, if we reason merely from the regular

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lar operation of moral causes, that the time will come when Christianity shall be diffused throughout the universe. Those nations which have embraced the Christian religion have acquired so complete an ascendancy over the rest of mankind, that, as it is truly incredible on the one hand, that they themselves should be induced to forsake the religion of their ancestors, and to adopt any other system from nations comparatively illiterate and barbarous; so on the other hand it seems perfectly consonant to the usual course of human events, that as the arts, and arms, and the learning of Europe, are every day making some progress, the religion of Europe will also gradually extend itself. And as to the important, but accidental circumstances, of its being professed by that part of the globe which has obtained so prodigious and decisive a superiority, it possesses the intrinsic advantage of an *appearance* of evidence at least, as well as moral excellence, far beyond that of any religion which can be opposed to it. What can be the result of a contest so circumstanced, but the final downfall of those various systems of superstition and absurdity which at present prevail in the world? A long succession of ages must no doubt previously roll away: but if we consider the different aspect which Christianity now wears, from that which it presented two or three centuries ago:

ago: If we consider the prodigious improvements which have been made during this period in every branch of human knowledge: If we consider with how much greater facility that knowledge is now capable of being communicated, in consequence of the mutual intercourse which is established, and the intimate connections which subsist between the most distant parts of the globe: If we contemplate the ardent and enterprising spirit by which the European nations are animated, the surprizing effects which that spirit has already produced, and the still more wonderful effects which it is calculated to produce, it will not appear to a reflecting mind incredible or improbable, that Christianity, abstracted from the idea of a particular superintending Providence, will insensibly prevail over all opposition, and ultimately become the universal religion of mankind. But is it possible that a few illiterate impostors, or at best enthusiasts, should frame a religious system, which thus bids fair to descend to the latest generations; bidding defiance to the united attacks of wit, learning, and malice? Is it possible that the original author of this wonderful delusion, the man who bled on Calvary, should be acknowledged as the immediate delegate of Heaven, commissioned to execute the purposes of divine compassion and mercy, by those who may be reasonably supposed

both

both able and willing to detect and expose the fraud, however cunningly devised; by the wisest and best of mankind; by the most enlightened geniuses of the most enlightened ages and countries? This is monstrous and incredible; a thing past all comprehension and belief: it is impossible that an imposture, framed under such circumstances, could endure the test of a serious and impartial discussion. If a forgery, it must be a gross and palpable one, such as no man of sense or reflection could hesitate for a moment whether to receive or reject. What a paradox for the enemies of Christianity to solve! that a religion, which they affirm to be totally destitute of evidence, should have prevailed over such potent opposition; and should still go on conquering and to conquer by the mere force of evidence.

But, 3dly, Independent of the proofs arising from testimony and from prophecy, there is another argument which has often been urged by the advocates of Christianity with great success, and that is, the intrinsic excellence of our holy religion. This has been generally distinguished by the appellation of the *internal evidence* of Christianity. And of this, a striking view has been given by an elegant and justly admired writer of our own times. It would be indeed difficult to vindicate all that Mr. Jenyns has thought proper to advance in that popular performance. And
folly

folly only would attempt to explain how the divinity of any contested doctrine can be inferred from “its contrariety to every principle of human reason, as well as to all our ideas of the divine attributes.” But the divine origin of Christianity may be deduced from its perfect consonancy to the principles of natural religion, and to those ideas which reason teaches us to entertain of the Supreme Being, without at all countenancing the opinion that “Christianity is as old as the Creation,” or that unassisted reason was capable of demonstrating those sublime truths which constitute the fundamental articles of the Christian faith.

Christianity, shortly defined, is such a revelation as reason would teach us to hope for, and with gratitude and joy to receive. It confirms those exalted ideas which reason taught some of her most favoured votaries to entertain of the being and perfections of a God, of the reality of a future state of existence, of the necessity of virtue in order to attain happiness in that state; and it inculcates a system of the purest morality, such as has a direct tendency to diffuse a universal spirit of benevolence, unity, and concord. This religion, while it ascribes glory to God in the highest, breathes peace on earth and goodwill to men. In a word, it is a religion worthy its divine author. It is not only a system too re-

fined

fined and exalted for a few ignorant and illiterate men to frame or invent; but it is far superior in dignity, in consistency and utility, to all that the genius, the learning, and the philanthropy of a Socrates, a Plato, a Tully, a Seneca, or an Antoninus could effect, in their united and immortal labors for the purpose of instructing and of reforming mankind. "There hath not," says that pride and ornament of our own country, Lord Bacon, "been discovered in any age, any philosophy, opinion, religion, law, or discipline, which so greatly exalts the common and lessens individual interest as the Christian religion doth."

S E C T. II.

THAT objection to the divine origin of our religion which seems entitled to our first notice and attention, as being if not the most formidable perhaps the most acute and ingenious which has ever been urged by the enemies of Christianity, and also of such a nature as, if valid, to supersede all other objections, is contained in Mr. Hume's celebrated Essay on Miracles. "A miracle," says Mr. Hume, "is a violation of the established laws of nature. Now the credit due to miracles rests entirely upon testimony; but no

testimony can be sufficient in this case to produce a rational conviction; for, however cogent the proof derived from this source may be represented, still it must be acknowledged that the falsehood of the strongest testimony does not amount to a violation of the established laws of nature: or, in other words, is not absolutely miraculous. Therefore if we believe a miracle upon the credit of the strongest human testimony conceivable, we admit, of two improbable things, that which is most improbable; whereas reason requires us to reject the miracle, except the falsehood of the testimony should be more miraculous than the event it is intended to establish." This is the objection in its full force; but however ingenious and plausible it may be deemed, the fallacy of it immediately appears from this consideration, that the evidence of testimony obviously admits of such an accumulation of force as to produce necessarily and mechanically a degree of conviction fully equal to the evidence of sense. Whatever is capable, then, of being proved by the senses, is capable of being equally proved by testimony. To say that the testimony upon which Christianity is founded is of inferior force to that which proves the existence of the pyramids of Egypt or the great wall of China, is totally to desert his argument, which positively denies the sufficiency of that species of evidence, abstractedly

abstractedly considered, to prove any event of a miraculous nature. But certainly it cannot be irrational to believe where it is impossible to disbelieve.

Nevertheless, as whatever truth is capable of being opposed by argument is capable of being defended by argument, this famous paradox of Mr. Hume, no doubt, demands a more strict and logical confutation. The objection resolves itself into two distinct propositions, one of which is true and the other false. First, It is true that a weaker evidence cannot destroy a stronger: in other words, it must be admitted, that of two inconsistent propositions, that is to be adopted which is upon the whole best supported by proof, or most probable. But, 2dly, It is false that a miracle is invariably to be regarded as the greatest of all improbabilities. "Uniform experience," as Mr. Hume well observes, "is the basis of rational assurance." And our uniform experience of human nature must convince us, that men are wholly actuated by motives. Now if, in order to obviate the testimony which is offered to authenticate an event of a miraculous nature, the resurrection of Christ for instance, it is necessary to suppose that the assertors were actuated by such motives as are totally incompatible with those immutable principles upon which human nature is founded, it would be absurd, in

such a case, not to admit the reality of the miracle; as it would doubtless be much more incredible that the fundamental principles of human nature should suffer a total alteration, than that the Creator of the world should condescend, in a way which we call miraculous, to make a revelation of his will to mankind. In this supposition there is certainly nothing absurd or improbable in itself. It is objected only, that such an interposition is not agreeable to experience. Not to our experience, it must be acknowledged; but to assert that it is not agreeable to the experience of former ages, is evidently to beg the question. It is positively affirmed that such interposition has actually taken place. But when, or by whom was it ever pretended, that human nature was 2000 years ago constituted on principles diametrically opposite to those by which it is actuated at present? In this case, therefore, we have the indubitable experience of all ages to oppose to an experience not uniformly confirmed by the testimony of former ages. In a word, the hypothesis which implies a want of uniformity in human nature, involves in it a complication of confusion and absurdity, being wholly unsupported by evidence, and violating every principle of reason. But the supposition, which admits a divine miraculous interposition, is confirmed by a cloud of witnesses; and it is likewise perfectly

perfectly consonant to those ideas which reason teaches, or at least favors, respecting the nature and attributes of the Deity, and agreeable to the general analogy of the divine government.

It would be improper to pass unnoticed another sophism of Mr. Hume, closely connected with the former, and worthy of the same author. He pretends, that of two opposite arguments, the superior only gives us an assurance corresponding to that degree of force which remains after deducting the inferior. This is a maxim which seems calculated to introduce a system of universal scepticism; for if it is just, we cannot attain to the assurance of any one truth but what admits of mathematical demonstration. How happens it, then, that Mr. Hume should, in contradiction to his own theory, reject all the proofs and evidences of Christianity with such positive disdain? It cannot be denied that, taken collectively, they form a strong body of evidence, amounting to what some have not scrupled to stile a moral demonstration. This evidence, nevertheless, is rejected by Mr. Hume as inconsistent with other and superior evidence. But, good Sir, will you please to deduct the force of the inferior from the force of the superior evidence, and then tell us what the balance amounts to in favour of infidelity? The sophism is obvious: moral evidence admits of a great variety

of degrees; and a proposition, established by satisfactory evidence, must necessarily be regarded as TRUE, though the proof fall far short of strict demonstration, and the metaphysical deduction, recommended by Mr. Hume, is consequently altogether impracticable. The mere consideration of an opposition of arguments has, in these circumstances, no sensible effect; and, when impartial reason once pronounces the evidence sufficient, objections, however plausible, vanish and dissolve; and the conquest of the Persian or Peruvian empires is received with the same facility as the most common and ordinary historic occurrence.

But, 2dly, It has been triumphantly asked concerning Christianity by some of its adversaries, *Cui bono?* They boldly assert, that nothing of importance is contained in Revelation which was not discoverable by the light of reason. They profess to admit the great doctrines of the unity and perfections of God: of the essential and unalterable distinction between moral good and evil: of the immateriality and immortality of the soul; and of a future state of rewards and punishments. All these things they admit. Admit! but upon what ground? The best solution of that difficult question, what religious truths are discoverable by the light of reason, is afforded by recurring to facts. And it will indisputably

bly appear, that even in those ages and countries which are most celebrated for intellectual improvements of every kind, very little advance was made in religious knowledge. It is true, a few of the heathen philosophers and moralists attained to a comparatively just view of the subject, but mixed with much error, darkness and uncertainty. The advocates of Christianity, therefore, deny without hesitation the fact on which the objection is founded. They say, that human reason is not capable of affording full and satisfactory evidence of the great truths of religion; that the greatest geniuses and most celebrated philosophers of antiquity were never able to attain to any thing like a firm conviction of the truth of these fundamental doctrines; and that it is in the highest degree improbable that the world would ever have been influenced, in any considerable degree, by any attempts to inculcate these truths upon natural principles: because the evidence on which they rested was in itself so abstruse as to be far above the comprehension of vulgar capacities; and at the same time so ambiguous, that the few who were capable of comprehending it could never attain to a thorough persuasion of the truth and certainty of the principles which it was the object of that evidence to establish.

3dly, There are some who are perfectly sensible of the value and importance of the discoveries made by Revelation, and who would willingly embrace Christianity, were they not deterred by an idea that it also contains certain absurd and irrational tenets, such as are inconsistent with common sense and natural propriety, and therefore cannot possibly be supposed to proceed from a Being of perfect wisdom and knowledge: such as the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement, of Predestination, of Original Sin, &c. not to mention the strange and fabulous accounts recorded in those books which compose the Jewish Canon; such as the Mosaic account of Creation; of the Fall of Man; of the general Deluge, and the whole history of the Jewish Nation. But it is certain that many Christians, eminent for learning and ability, have deemed the rejection of these dogmas no impeachment of their Christianity. As to the doctrine of the Trinity, they assert that the term does not so much as once occur in all the Evangelical or Apostolical writings: that the Atonement means no more, whatever mystical ideas have been affixed to it, than the doctrine of reconciliation, in which sense they do not deny that “the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sin.” This was the mode in which infinite goodness was determined by infinite wisdom to
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exert itself in our behalf. But that the death of Christ was truly and literally a compensation and equivalent for the sins of mankind, and that his equal participation in the divine nature gave an infinite efficacy to that sacrifice which he offered on the Cross for the sins of the elect, are tenets happily as repugnant to the sense of Scripture as to common sense. The doctrine of Original Sin, as it is styled by Theologians, or the Origin of Moral Evil, is a question as closely connected with natural as revealed religion; and Predestination must upon every system be so far admitted as to compel the acknowledgment, that happiness and misery are dispensed to every intelligent being in such proportions as God in his sovereign wisdom thinks fit. “He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy,” and according to different degrees of improvement to which we may attain in moral excellence, shall we participate of the divine favour.

With respect to the difficulties attending the Mosaic and Jewish histories, Christianity undoubtedly supposes that the Jewish nation was distinguished from all others by a series of supernatural interpositions; but whether that series is related with accuracy by the Jewish historians; whether any spurious additions have in a long course of ages been made to those writings; whether the Jewish traditions related by Moses respecting

respecting the creation of the world, the fall of Adam, or the general deluge, &c. may be implicitly depended upon; all these things are matters of comparatively trifling import, and every one is at liberty to form the best hypothesis he can for his own satisfaction. But it must surely be a very extraordinary and preposterous species of incredulity which should reject the clear and positive evidence of Christ's resurrection, because certain popular stories recorded in the Jewish annals may perhaps rest upon slender and dubious authority.

4thly, It is objected that probable evidence only is or can be offered by the advocates of Christianity in its behalf. Now it might, say these objectors, be reasonably presumed that a divine revelation would be attended with demonstrative and irresistible evidence of its divine authority—such as should flash conviction on the most obdurate hearts; nor has this religion been in fact productive of those beneficial effects which might be expected from a genuine revelation of the divine will. That Christianity might have been accompanied by such irresistible evidence as would have compelled conviction cannot be doubted; but that such an high degree of evidence was reasonably to be expected must be positively denied. According to the obvious analogy of nature, nothing more than proba-

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bility could be hoped for, or perhaps rationally desired. Man is so formed as to act on probabilities, in all cases which concern his present or future happiness. To ascertain the comparative importance of these probabilities, and frame our conduct agreeably to the views we entertain of that importance, is the perfection of human wisdom. He who waits for demonstration where probability only is attainable, is chargeable with the absurdity attributed to the countryman lingering on the river's banks. He remains forever inactive, in expectation of that which will never happen. The tide of time shall roll on, but never shall any one, in this state of trial and probation, be indulged on any subject relative to man's duty or happiness with evidence of such kind or degree, as shall preclude him from the full exercise of his rational and intellectual powers. And by an impartial and diligent exertion of these powers, the evidence attending Christianity will quickly appear to be sufficiently probable to satisfy the understanding and to influence the conduct. And though we should be ultimately mistaken, we may in this case, if in any, adopt the expression of the poet, and say in our vindication,

" It had been vicious to have mistrusted."

As to the plea, that Christianity has not been
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productive of those signal benefits which might have been expected from a divine revelation, it is enough to reply, that expectation is vague and indefinite. The fact is, that the Christian religion, greatly as it has been corrupted, has produced a mighty reformation of morals in the world. We see plainly that it is in a state of progression, and in proportion as it is better understood and more generally diffused, its effects will be more happy and beneficial. In this enlightened age and country, a Christian of very moderate attainments in virtue would be shocked at the recital of the enormous vices which were almost universally prevalent in the ages of antiquity. The heathens, as is well known, attributed the grossest crimes and immoralities even to their deities. How then could it be expected that they themselves should abstain from the practice of them. The Author of Christianity, with the highest beauty of metaphor, compares the Gospel to a small seed, which being cast into the earth, at length becomes a tall and spreading tree; so that birds seek for shelter in the branches of it. This prophetic description will no doubt in due time be realised; *The leaves of the tree are destined for the healing of the nations.* In the mean time we have no right to complain of the slow and gradual progress of this grand scheme of reformation: nor have we any more reason to expect a
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clear solution of this difficulty, “ Why does not Christianity afford an immediate and complete remedy for moral evil,” than of the still greater difficulty, “ Why was evil itself introduced into the universe ?”

Fifthly, It is said, “ that if the miracles of Christ were real miracles, it is not possible that any degree of incredulity or prejudice could have resisted the force of them ; but an immediate conversion of the Jewish nation, and in a short time of the whole Gentile world, must have been the inevitable consequence of such an astonishing exertion of divine power.” But this objection argues either great ignorance of human nature, or of the actual state of things at the time of Christ’s appearance. It is not easy for us to form an idea of the prodigious shock which the principles of the Christian religion gave to all the preconceived opinions and prejudices of the Jews. That the Messiah, their long-expected Prince and Saviour, should at last appear in circumstances so mean, obscure, and indigent ; that the great Deliverer, so magnificently described by the prophets of old, should be no other than Jesus of Nazareth, the Carpenter’s Son ; that the kingdom he came to establish should be “ not of this world,” but of a wholly spiritual nature ; that the benefits and privileges of it should not be confined to God’s peculiar people, but extended to
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the Gentile nations; that a few illiterate fishermen should be selected as the friends and followers of the Messiah, and employed as the great instruments of diffusing his religion to the exclusion of the learned, the noble, and the mighty of the land; that after being exposed to every species of indignity and persecution in the short course of his life, he should suffer a painful and ignominious death upon the cross; these were things utterly irreconcilable with the opinions which were most deeply rooted in their minds. They were a rock of offence, which even the evidence of miracles themselves was unable to remove. "He pretended to save others, but himself he cannot save;" this was, in their apprehension, an argument of the most convincing nature. They rather chose to ascribe those supernatural works, the reality of which they could not deny, to the agency of Beelzebub than to that of the Spirit of God. And let any one duly reflect upon the astonishing and invincible force of human prejudices, and say whether a man, who should now openly maintain at Mecca or Medina that Mahommed was an impostor, would not run the risque of being impaled, though able to establish his assertion even by an appeal to miracles. What has been said respecting the Jews, may easily be seen to apply with still greater force to the Gentiles, whose prejudices, though
totally

totally different, were no doubt equally strong; and if the Jews were not to be convinced, though one rose from the dead, it cannot be supposed that the Gentiles would be more inclined to listen to evidence which came to them with diminished force. And as it is well known that the Jews were regarded with contempt by the Greeks and Romans as a credulous and bigotted nation, it may reasonably be presumed that the first account of a new religion, supported by miracles which obtained so little credit in Judea itself, would be treated with the highest disdain and derision by the learned heathens, and would be rejected without hesitation or examination. Sixthly, "How can that revelation," it is said, "be of divine authority which is not perfectly consistent with itself? Now it is easy to point out a variety of inconsistencies, both with respect to facts and reasonings in those books which compose the canon of Scripture, and in which only the Christian religion is contained."

This objection is founded upon a very erroneous notion, which has been and still is too much countenanced by the professors of Christianity themselves, who in general maintain that the sacred writings were composed under the immediate influence of divine inspiration, a notion highly improbable in itself, plainly contrary to the general tenor of scripture, and wholly desti-

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tute of proof, excepting such as may be derived from a gross perversion of a few detached passages. The Apostles and Evangelists never pretended, like the great impostor Mahommed, that their writings were dictated by the angel Gabriel, or ever urged the perfection of their own compositions as a decisive proof of the authenticity of the Christian religion. They were indeed witnesses faithful and true; men of strict integrity, who had the best opportunity of being informed of the leading facts which they asserted, and who were under no conceivable temptation to wish to impose a vile and incredible falsehood upon the world, and men who were of all others least likely to succeed in so absurd an attempt. But the testimony they gave to the truth of Christianity was to all intents a human testimony, established indeed by miracles and prophecies, but by no means exempt from those venial errors which accompany every thing human. Were we even convinced that, in a decree promulgated by the joint authority of the twelve Apostles, there were contained any article which demonstrated that they were not entirely emancipated from Jewish weakness and prejudice; were it clearly proved that the reasonings of St. Paul or St. Peter were sometimes inconclusive, or that the facts reported by St. Luke or St. Matthew were in some points inaccurately stated, we might
still

still believe, with exactly the same degree of rational confidence, that Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead, and that he will come again to judge the world in righteousness.

But if an entire and implicit dependance is not to be placed on every part of holy writ, where shall we draw the line? If a habit of scepticism is indulged, where shall we stop? Such is the language of weakness and timidity. But it may be asked, what necessity is there for drawing a precise line or boundary in this case, or what pretence is there for requiring a degree of precision on this subject, which moral subjects in general, and the very nature of moral evidence do not admit? Let every man use that portion of reason and understanding which God hath given him, for the purpose of investigating the evidence and the principles of Christianity, and let him determine for himself, after a cool and impartial deliberation, what this religion teaches and upon what authority it stands. Let not the apprehension or reproach of scepticism alarm or deter him from the most perfect freedom of enquiry; for that investigation which does not originate in doubt, can never terminate in rational conviction.

SECT. III.

THE evidence upon which the Christian religion rests, and the objections to which it is liable having been stated, it now remains to make a few general remarks upon the genius and spirit of this religion, in respect to which it differs most essentially from all other religions which have ever appeared in the world. We may instance in the following particulars; its philanthropy, its simplicity, and its rationality.

First, It breathes a spirit of ardent, of universal, of unlimited benevolence. This spirit is indeed not so properly a part or a distinguishing feature of Christianity, as the sum and substance of it. To this great end the sacred writings, both apostolical and evangelical, evidently tend; and upon this plain and express command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and thy neighbour as thyself," depend both the law and the prophets. In short, Christianity alone of all religions has for its object the happiness, present and future, of all mankind. So intimately blended is this spirit of benevolence with the spirit of Christianity, and so impracticable is it to eradicate from the mind the idea of this union, that in the darkest ages of Popery,

Popery, when Christendom was sunk in the lowest abyſſes of ignorance and error, when the demon of fanaticiſm ſeemed to preſide over the affairs of men, and the moſt malignant and diabolical paſſions were conſecrated to the ſervice of religion, and were ſuppoſed moſt effectually to recommend mankind to the divine favor, the ultimate advancement of human happineſs was ſtill the avowed motive of thoſe actions, which were in fact moſt directly ſubverſive of that end. When the horrid notion was univerſally prevalent, that everlaſting miſery muſt be the inevitable lot of thoſe who were not within the pale of the Catholic church, it is no wonder that the moſt inhuman barbarity ſhould be practiſed, even by men of tempers naturally mild and gentle, in order to enforce the profeſſion of that ſyſtem of faith which promiſed, and which could alone ensure future and eternal felicity. If the divine favor be inſeparably connected with the belief of certain ſpeculative opinions, and not with the practice of certain moral and religious duties, it is doubtleſs a proof of the higheſt regard for the true intereſts of our fellow-creatures to take every poſſible method of diffuſing the knowledge and belief of thoſe tenets, and of deterring by wholeſome ſeverities any attempts to innovate upon that ſyſtem, an entire and implicit acquieſcence in which is pronounced by infallible au-

thority to be the sole means of attaining to happiness in a future state. All virtue is founded on the basis of utility: if then the torture or even the destruction of the body be necessary to the salvation of the soul, this discipline, though sharp and rigorous, is just and laudable; and the rack, the stake, and the wheel, are all converted into the benign instruments of Christian compassion.

If these are genuine deductions, with what horror should we regard the principle from which they flow! viz. that faith, unconnected with right temper and conduct, can in the remotest degree tend to render us acceptable in the sight of God. It is indeed true, and the Romish church has in a manner peculiarly striking demonstrated this truth, that faith or right sentiments have a strict and inseparable connection with virtue or right conduct. But still it must be acknowledged, that faith is no farther valuable than as it guides us to the love and practice of virtue; and that to limit the divine favor to the belief of any set of speculative principles is to subvert the foundation of morality, and to counteract the obvious design of the Christian revelation. Happily the great end and object of that revelation begins to be better understood and more generally acknowledged; and we shall at last perhaps become sensible, that our own
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ultimate happiness is to be attained only by promoting, as far as our sphere of action and influence extends, the happiness of others; and that the general happiness is most effectually promoted by diffusing a spirit of universal charity, of mutual forbearance and of humble piety.

2dly, Another remarkable characteristic of Christianity is its simplicity. To the utter confusion of systems and system-makers, and astonishing as the fact confessedly is, the great Founder of our religion left no records or written memorials respecting the end and object of his mission for the information of posterity. He lived a life of the most unexampled piety and devotion, of the most ardent and disinterested benevolence: he wrought numerous miracles in support of the authenticity of his mission: he died upon the cross agreeably to his own prediction, and rose again the third day triumphantly from the grave, and ascended into Heaven, whence he will come again at the final dissolution of the world, in the fulness of divine power, to raise the dead to life, and to render to every man according to his works. Of these awful and momentous truths we are assured by evidence, the validity of which cannot be questioned, without adopting principles utterly subversive of the credit of all human testimony: and they contain the sum and substance of the Christian revelation. It was not

however till a considerable interval of time had elapsed after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, that any regular and authentic accounts were published of the principal events of his life and tenets of his doctrine: and even then not by any previous and express commission from him, but in order to gratify the anxious and laudable desire of the numerous profelytes to this new religion, it appears that the Evangelical histories were at length compiled. We have, indeed, other writings of Apostolical authority, which, invaluable as they may justly be deemed, are however, the Apocalypse excepted, all likewise of an occasional nature, written at different times to different societies of Christians, upon different emergencies. Nothing therefore but the prophecies contained in those writings, together with a few passages professedly penned from immediate inspiration, appear to be strictly speaking of divine authority. The Epistles comprised in the Scriptural canon breathe indeed a truly Christian and Evangelical spirit. They are in every respect worthy of the great and venerable characters to whom they are ascribed: but the writers certainly do not arrogate to themselves that plenary degree of inspiration, they do not exact that blind and implicit acquiescence in their opinions, which is at present generally conceived essential to the exercise of Apostolical authority.

authority. The Christian religion subsisted long before St. Paul wrote his celebrated Epistles: and it is doing Christianity mighty wrong to deduce from those Epistles an abstruse system of speculative theology, and to pronounce that system essential to Christianity. It is plain that in a variety of respects the Apostles differed in opinion amongst themselves. Are we to attempt the preposterous task of reconciling discordant and contradictory opinions, because each opinion separately may plead the sanction of Apostolical authority? If it were proper in such a case to range under the banners of any party, a Christian philosopher would perhaps be tempted to exclaim, "I am of PAUL." This great Apostle, not only in the disputed questions relative to circumcision, meat offered to idols, &c. but in his general views, and in every part of his conduct, discovers a liberality and comprehension of mind to which the other Apostles were comparatively strangers. His stile is indeed harsh, abrupt, vehement, and highly rhetorical: but with a proper allowance for the Oriental magnificence of diction which so remarkably distinguishes the writings of this accomplished scholar of Gamaliel, even those passages which appear most "hard to be understood," respecting the dignity of Christ's nature, and the value of that sacrifice which he offered upon the cross, are

perfectly reconcilable with the more plain and simple representations of the Evangelical historians.

But, 3dly, closely connected with the simplicity of the Christian religion is its rationality. What, indeed, can be imagined more agreeable to reason than the grand and leading articles of the Christian faith? That there exists one supreme God, infinite in all perfections, the fountain of being and of happiness—that the whole series of events, consequently, is under the guidance of unerring rectitude and wisdom—that the present life is intended as a state of trial and probation; and that mankind, by progressive improvements in moral excellence, may render themselves capable of participating in the refined and spiritual pleasures of a future state; that Christ was delegated from Heaven to ascertain, and to publish this grand fact, respecting a connection between the present and a future state of existence; and that he will appear a second time to judge the world in righteousness. Are these doctrines hard to be understood, or hard to be believed? They are not, indeed, truths which unassisted reason could ever demonstrate; therefore some persons, who are the avowed enemies; and, strange as it may seem, others, who are the avowed friends of Christianity, have not scrupled to assert that the
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doctrines of revelation are contrary to reason; or, in other words, that they are irrational and absurd. This charge, or this concession, is however founded on a gross and palpable sophism.

If for a moment we could suppose that a Newton had never existed, and that the true system of the universe had been discovered by supernatural illumination, would that system have been deemed irrational, because human reason would in that case have been unequal to the discovery of the truths demonstrated by that illustrious philosopher? Though plausible, and, as it now appears, well founded conjectures, were formed respecting the moral attributes, and moral government of the Deity, in the one case, and respecting the true system of the universe in the other, we could never have attained to moral certainty as to the former, or to mathematical demonstration as to the latter, without the aid of supernatural illumination, or of such a stupendous superiority of genius as fell scarcely short of it. But are these discoveries therefore to be branded as irrational? Surely the disgrace of irrationality can belong only to those who either advance or admit so futile an accusation. The truth is, that the doctrines of Christianity were always agreeable to reason; i.e. to abstract truth and rectitude, although before they were actually revealed

revealed they might, without impropriety, be said to be adverse to reason; i. e. to the light of reason, which was not adequate to such attainments.

A late elegant writer, Mr. Jenyns, in a much admired treatise, has, however, thought proper to censure, without reserve, and in a very high tone, those “pretended Christians,” as he pleases to stile them, who have the presumption to assert, and even, as he might have added, the assurance to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity. “To prove the reasonableness of revelation is, in fact, to destroy it,” says this champion of revelation. If this is admitted, it must be owned that the credit of revelation is, indeed, in a very critical and alarming state. For upon this ground, the only mode of proving it credible is to prove it to be unreasonable; and arguing *a fortiori*, the more unreasonable the more credible, till at last we shall happily arrive at that famous conclusion, which Mr. Jenyns will doubtless allow to be of itself a ground of assent amounting to intuitive certainty, “*Credo quia impossibile est.*”

“Several learned and ingenious writers have,” as this gentleman informs us, “undertaken the arduous task of reconciling revelation and reason: for which purpose they have, with inconsiderate rashness, expunged every divine declaration which agrees not exactly with their own notions of truth and rectitude: and this they have attempted

tempted by no other means than by absurd declarations, or bold assertions, that they are not there; as some philosophers have ventured to deny the existence of matter, for no other reason than because they find in it properties which they are unable to account for." Now this is certainly a reason which no philosopher or theologist ever thought of offering in his own vindication.—Those philosophers who call in question the existence of matter think themselves able to account for its physical properties, or for the actual phænomena of nature in another mode, which they deem more satisfactory and less perplexing than the commonly received hypothesis. And those divines also who have the presumption to explain a controverted passage in a sense different from the sense of Mr. Jenyns, which appears to be all which is really meant, if any meaning can be elicited from phraseology so confused and charges so incongruous, "find in it properties" which they imagine themselves better able to account for by adopting a rational than an irrational interpretation, though Mr. Jenyns may still enjoy the satisfaction of thinking that the irrational sense bids fairest for being the true sense of the passage.

"Thus," continues Mr. Jenyns, "they have reduced Christianity to a mere system of ethics, and retain no part of it but the moral, which is,

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in fact, no characteristic part of it at all; as this, though in a manner less perfect, makes a part of every religion which has ever appeared in the world." That morality makes a part of every religion that has ever appeared in the world, is true; but then the rational Christian deems with higher reverence than Mr. Jenyns seems to do of the difference between Pagan and Christian morality. But the principal stress is by the rationalist placed on considerations which do not appear even to have occurred to Mr. Jenyns; viz. on those awful sanctions by which that pure and perfect system of morality is guarded—sanctions resulting from the nature and attributes of the Deity, and that fundamental, or, to use the expression of Mr. Jenyns, that *characteristic* part of Christianity, the doctrine of a future resurrection.

"During the last century," as Mr. Jenyns informs us, "the fashionable philosophers were for the most part Atheists, who ascribed every thing to chance, fate, or necessity, exclusive of all intelligence or design. These mighty giants, who fought against Heaven, being at length overthrown by the absurdity of their own principles, and the superior abilities of their adversaries, retreated about the beginning of the present to the more tenable fort of Deism. But here again being frequently worsted, they at last took shelter under the covert-way of rational
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Christianity, where they now make their stand, and attack revelation with less odium and more success than from the open plains of professed Deism." This paragraph is penned with such ingenuity, that one cannot, without some degree of reluctance, remark, that its *prettiness* is its only merit. For it so happens, that the fashionable philosophers of the last century were for the most part not Atheists, but Deists. It is well known, in particular, that Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the celebrated Harrington, Sir William Temple, Mr. Blount, Mr. Hobbes, and Mr. Toland, were professed Deists; and the insinuation that as Atheism gradually subsided into Deism, so Deism is at last absorbed in a pretended conversion to rational Christianity, is equally unfortunate; for open and avowed Deism is certainly at least as prevalent now as at any former period. But such are the wanderings of those writers, who, careless or ignorant of facts, are guided by the *ignis fatuus* of their own imaginations. It is, however, unquestionably as bad a compliment to Christianity itself as to some of its most learned and respectable advocates, to suppose, with Mr. Jenyns, that all the attempts of those able writers to defend and to demonstrate the reasonableness of it, are to be regarded as so many proofs that they are not in earnest. It was formerly deemed a mere effort

effort of derision to maintain, with a face of gravity, that Christianity is *not* founded on argument. In future, it seems, it is to be considered as an exercise of pleasantry to maintain that Christianity *is* founded on argument.

“ So adverse, however,” Mr. Jenyns informs us, “ is Christianity to all the principles of human reason, that if brought before her tribunal it must inevitably be condemned by so incompetent a judge. If we give no credit to its divine authority, any attempt to reconcile them is useless; and if we believe it, presumptuous in the highest degree. A revelation implies information of something which reason cannot discover, and therefore must be something different from its deductions, or it would be no revelation.” That any attempt to reconcile reason and revelation, while we deny the divine authority of the latter, must be superfluous, is indeed self-evident: but that such an attempt in those who acknowledge the authority of revelation is the highest presumption, is an assertion to be expected only from a Papist pleading in defence of transubstantiation. And it is a most contemptible quibble to pretend that the doctrines of revelation must necessarily be contrary to the dictates of reason, merely because they contain truths which reason could not discover. The deductions of reason must be founded on such
evidence

evidence as we possess: "What can we reason but from what we know?" By the aid of revelation we are happily enabled to discern that to be conformable to abstract truth, which unassisted reason could only express an unavailing wish, an almost hopeless desire to find so. "Reason," says Mr. Locke, with his usual accuracy of distinction, "as contra-distinguished from faith, I take to be the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths as the mind arrives at by use of its natural faculties. Faith is the assent to any proposition not thus made out by the deductions of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God by some extraordinary way of communication. This way of discovering truths to men we call revelation*." It must have been in the school of Thomas Aquinas doubtless, and not of Locke, that Mr. Jenyns imbibed his favourite idea of the incompatibility of reason and faith.

"The writers of the New Testament," says Mr. Jenyns, "frequently declare, that the religion which they teach is a mystery. What then is this mystery? Not the moral precepts of the Gospel; for they are no more a mystery than the Ethics of Aristotle, or the Offices of Cicero. The

* Essay on the Human Understanding, Book IV. Ch. 18.

mystery consists alone in these very doctrines which the rationalist explodes, because they disagree with the conclusions of his reason; that is, because they are mysteries, as they are avowed to be by those who taught them." It is true that the Christian revelation is frequently styled a mystery in the Apostolical writings; and with great propriety, because it contains doctrines which could never be discovered by the light of reason; but it is never affirmed or intimated that those doctrines, when revealed, still continue to be mysteries. The contrary is strongly implied in the very passage quoted by Mr. Jenyns in support of his assertion. "Having made known to us," says St. Paul, "the mystery of his will:" when the divine will was made known, it is evident it could no longer be deemed a mystery. So the same Apostle speaks of "the mystery which was hid from ages and generations, but which is now made manifest;" which mystery he declares to be *Christ in us the hope of glory*." "The first and leading sense of *μυστήριον*" says the learned Dr. Campbell, "is not that of the English word *mystery*, i. e. something incomprehensible by reason, but *arcantum*, a secret. It is adopted by the Septuagint as a term strictly corresponding with the Chaldaic *רֵזֶם*, *res arcana*. Nor is it confined to divine secrets. St. Paul tells us 'that the mystery of iniquity doth already work;' i. e. the

the spirit of Antichrist hath begun to operate, but the operation is latent and unperceived. The gospel of Christ is denominated a mystery; not because it contains any thing in its own nature dark and inconceivable, but because it treats of something that had been concealed for ages, but which was at length openly revealed."

Mr. Jenyns, however, in his great zeal to establish faith on the ruins of reason, labours on to prove, though happily with very ill success, that there is a real contrariety between them. "For instance, reason tells us that a Creator, infinitely powerful and good, could never permit any evil natural or moral to have a place in his works; because his goodness must induce him, and his power enable him to exclude them. Again, reason assures us that sufferings, though they may be just punishments for past crimes, and a means to prevent them for the future, can never be compensations for them; much less can the sufferings of one being atone for the guilt of another." But when did reason ever make any such false declaration as that a Creator, infinitely powerful and good, could never permit the existence of evil natural or moral? Whatever may be the degree of happiness imparted to finite beings, it must necessarily be finite. And a system, in which a mixture of evil is combined with a predominance of happiness, is just as easily reconcileable to in-

finite power and goodness, as a system of pure and unmixed happiness inferior in kind or degree. And reason affords many arguments which render it highly probable that happiness is, upon the whole, most effectually promoted by the introduction of evil into the universe: so that reason and faith are by no means at variance, as Mr. Jenyns pretends, with respect to this point. And as to his second instance, though it will be readily allowed that reason assures us the sufferings of one being can never be *compensations* for the crimes of another, no opposition between reason and revelation will be admitted in this case, because there exists not a single declaration in Scripture which affirms the contrary. Reason and revelation concur, indeed, in asserting that the sufferings of one being may be the means of procuring or of communicating happiness to others. And the sufferings and death of Christ, described under the emphatic figurative terms of propitiation and atonement, consonant to the Mosaic phraseology, afford a memorable instance of this remarkable truth—a truth, confirmed by unvarying testimony and universal experience.

“Of all men who are called Christians,” says Mr. Jenyns, “the rationalist seems to have least pretence to that denomination. He is no less adverse to the spirit than to the letter of this religion. The true Christian is humble, teachable,
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and diffident; the rationalist is assuming, obstinate, and self-sufficient." If these are the genuine characteristics of the sect, Mr. Jenyns is certainly in imminent danger of being mistaken for a rationalist himself, after all the pains he has taken to escape the imputation of rationality. Mr. Jenyns concludes with the following declaration. "I blame no one for want of faith, but for want of sincerity; not for being no Christian, but for pretending to be one without believing. The professed Deist gives Christianity fair play: if she cannot defend herself, let her fall. But the rational Christian assassinate her in the dark. The first attacks Christ, as did the multitude, with swords and staves; the latter, like Judas, betrays him with a kiss." Want of sincerity is, indeed, a very weighty and serious accusation. It is not only blameable, but highly criminal; and, without the strongest evidence, should not be imputed to any man. But upon what grounds does Mr. Jenyns charge that class of Christians with insincerity, whose boast and happiness it is to believe the religion of Christ to be a reasonable service? And some of whom have given proofs of their sincerity, little short of laying down their lives for the sake of it. Who is this, then, that dares to usurp the prerogative of God? and assumes, unauthorized and unqualified, the office of Judge and Searcher of hearts? Rash and in-

confiderate mortal! knowest thou not that thou must thyself stand at the same awful bar with those whom thou hast thus vilified, arraigned, and condemned? And when impleaded at that high tribunal who shall tell thy audit? Want of candour and charity is a crime of no less magnitude than want of sincerity; and he who scruples not to brand such men as a Jebb, a Lindsey, or a Priestley with insincerity, because their ideas of Christianity differ widely from his own, may be assured that he has imbibed but little of that divine spirit of Christian benevolence, without which, though he speak with the tongue of men and of angels; though he understand all mysteries and all knowledge; though he have faith so that he could remove mountains; though he bestow all his goods to feed the poor; and even though he devote his body to the flames to gain the glorious crown of martyrdom, he has lived in vain, and all these splendid distinctions will profit him nothing.

ESSAY IV.

ANIMADVERSIONS ON THE DECLARATION OF
THE LAST SENTIMENTS OF PERE LE COU-
RAYER.

PERE LE COURAYER was one of the most learned and venerable characters of the present century. It is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to introduce the following remarks by premising that he was a dignitary of the Gallican Church; and that about the year 1728 he distinguished himself by publishing a Treatise in defence of the validity of English ordination—a work at which such high offence was taken, that a prosecution was instituted against him in the Ecclesiastical Courts, and magnanimously disdaining to retract the opinions which he had advanced upon what appeared to him just and solid grounds, he was compelled to relinquish his preferments, and to seek refuge in England, where he resided near fifty years, and died in October 1776, at the very advanced age of ninety-five.

A few years previous to his decease, he put into the hands of the late Princess Amelia, who had long honoured him with her protection and patronage, a manuscript, containing a declaration

of his last sentiments respecting religion, written with great elegance of stile and vigour of understanding, though sinking under the pressure of extreme age and infirmity, and, to use his own words, “ dans la vue prochaine de la mort, & pret à paroître devant Dieu.” Agreeably to the desire of the venerable writer, the Princess kept the manuscript carefully concealed during the short remainder of his life; and at her own death bequeathed it, as a mark of high and distinguished regard, to Dr. Bell, Prebendary of Westminster, who finding himself at length authorized to make it public, determined to favor the world with a sight of this very remarkable confession of faith. From the inspection of it we perceive how far it is possible for a man of learning and candor to deviate from the popular and established *dogmata* of the Romish Church, without renouncing her communion. In this *formula* of faith we see the Roman Catholic religion exhibited in the most pleasing form, and depicted in the softest and most beautiful colours. Notwithstanding which, it is easy to discern that the genius of this religion is irreconcilably at variance with the spirit of Protestantism. It is obvious that the re-union between the Romish and Protestant Churches, which has been the object of the ardent and devout wishes of many excellent and benevolent Christians in both

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communions, can never take place—that the Catholics have it not in their power, without absolute ruin to their own cause, to make such concessions as will or ought to be deemed satisfactory by the Protestants: and that it argues a total ignorance of the true principles of Protestantism to suppose it possible, that the differences of opinion subsisting between the two churches will admit of any species of compromise or accommodation. This general decision will be best illustrated by an impartial review of the last sentiments of Pere Le Courayer, which, considered as the sentiments of a member of the Roman Catholic Church, must be acknowledged in the highest degree liberal, candid, and generous.

The venerable writer commences his declaration by professing his firm belief in the existence of one God, as a truth which all nature proclaims aloud; and against which the heart in vain rebels, in order to indulge its guilty passions with less apprehension or remorse—and his abhorrence of the two absurd and dangerous extremes of Atheism on the one side, and Polytheism on the other. He then proceeds to declare his faith in Jesus Christ, and in the divinity of his mission and doctrine; respecting which he says, “ Il n’y a rien que ne soit conforme aux plus pures lumières de la raison, qui ne soit tres avantageux au bien commun de la société, & qui par consé-

quent merite mieux notre acquiescement et notre obeissance." He goes on to observe, that the doctrine of the Trinity, which many have made a pretext for the rejection of Christianity, as being inconsistent with that fundamental truth of religion the absolute unity of the divine nature, has been grossly misunderstood and misrepresented. "Of all the different modes of explaining the dogma of the Trinity," says this excellent man, "I know none more contrary to the true doctrine of Christianity than that which supposes the existence of three distinct natures or substances, whether collateral or subordinate, in the divine essence.—This," says he, "is, in my apprehension, to re-establish Polytheism under pretence of explaining a mystery. Christ and his Apostles evidently supposed that the Jews entertained just ideas respecting this subject; and they knew nothing of any distinction of substances in the divine nature. And Christians who use this language corrupt a plain and simple truth by strange and unintelligible explications."

—"Je crois donc," to transcribe his own words, "qu'il n'y a qu'un seul Dieu; que son esprit n'est point une substance distinguée de lui; et que Jesus Christ à qui la divinité a été très-intimement unie est son fils en vertu de cette union. C'est là toute la Trinité que je trouve dans l'évangile,

gile, et je ne conçois pas quel autre genre de Trinité peut s'accorder avec l'unité de Dieu.

The incarnation of Christ also the venerable Father affirms to be no more contrary to this great truth than the dogma of the Trinity. "It is very remarkable," says he, "that neither Christ nor his Apostles ever represent these doctrines as things incomprehensible and irreconcilable to reason." "Dieu ayan voulu tirer les hommes de leurs erreurs, et les purifier de leurs péchés, a rempli de sa sagesse Jésus Christ, lá revêtu de sa puissance, et s'est uni si intimement à lui que toute la plénitude de la Divinité a résidé corporellement en lui.—Ainsi tout se rapportant toujours a Dieu sans le terminer a Jésus Christ, que n'est regardé que comme l'organe et l'instrument de la puissance et de la miséricorde de son pere, c'est toujours Dieu seul, qui est le terme de nos adorations: et il n'y a rien de choquant a concevoir qu'il puisse se communiquer à un homme aussi pleinement et aussi intimement, qu'il le juge nécessaire pour sa propre gloire, et pour le salut du genre humaine." From the different explanations of this intimate union of the Divinity with the human nature of Christ, have arisen, as the venerable writer proceeds to observe, the most fatal divisions amongst Christians. "Some have talked of hypostases, of personalities, of subsistencies.

Others

Others have made a ridiculous intermixture of the divinity with the humanity."—"On fait un melange ridicule de la divinite avec l'humanite." "In order to avoid these extravagancies, it is necessary," says he, "to rest in the simplicity of the gospel. In consequence of indulging a vehement desire of discovering new mysteries, an infinity of idle reveries have been elevated to the rank of essentials of religion; which, when sanctified by time, it is considered as impious to reject or even to question."

These sentiments respecting the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity, bear a very striking resemblance to the opinions of the philosophical and learned Unitarians of the early ages of the church, Sabellius, Photinus, Paulus Samosatensis, &c. And in reality they differ no otherwise from those of the modern Unitarians than in the unwarrantable, or at least, the unguarded use of certain figurative and unscriptural modes of phraseology; and in the introduction of certain scholastic terms, of which the term *Trinity* itself may perhaps be justly accounted as the most exceptionable. Upon the whole he concludes, that it is not the personal dignity of Christ which is the grand object of the Christian faith, but the doctrine which he came to teach. And of the number of those truths which are comprised in that doctrine, he considers the
immortality

immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, as amongst the most important. As to the former, he pronounces it to be inculcated with scarcely less clearness and certainty by the light of reason than by the authority of revelation itself. But concerning the nature of that future state of existence, as it respects either rewards or punishments, we are left wholly to dark and vague conjecture. “*Tout ce qu'on dit d'un purgatoire et de ses peines, du lieu et des différentes sortes de supplices dans l'enfer, de la nature même de notre beatitude, et de nos récompenses, n'est fondé que sur des expressions metaphorique qui nous laissent dans une ignorance assez profonde de la nature du bonheur et du malheur de l'autre vie. Tout ce qu'il y a de certain sur cela c'est que sûrement la vertu sera récompensée et le vice puni.*”

Of the resurrection of the body, Pere Le Courayer acknowledges himself unable to comprehend either the manner or the use. Upon the authority of Scripture, however, he receives it as an undoubted article of the Christian faith. It might have contributed much to relieve his perplexity on this subject had it occurred to him, that “the resurrection of the body” is an expression no where to be found in Scripture. “It is not,” says Mr. Locke, “the resurrection of the body, but the resurrection of the dead
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which is uniformly taught in the sacred writings." And St. Paul had so little idea of connecting the resurrection of the same percipient intelligent principle with the resurrection of the same body, that he treats with indignant contempt, as an impertinent and useless enquiry, the question which he supposes to be started by some curious speculatist, "How are the dead raised? and with what bodies do they come?" "Thou fool!" exclaims the Apostle, "there are celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial. As we have borne the image of the earthly, so shall we also bear the image of the heavenly; for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." A glorious material vehicle was, it seems, agreeably to this Apostolical hypothesis, to be provided by divine power for the reception of the re-vivified spirit: but of the nature and properties of this celestial body the Apostle himself did not pretend to have any distinct knowledge.

The learned Father next proceeds to declare his sentiments as to the abstruse and difficult doctrines respecting the liberty of the human will, the eternity of the divine decrees, and the origin of evil natural and moral; which, as he observes, for thirteen centuries have been the subjects of disputation among Christians. These topics, however, were as much the occasion of
debate

debate and discussion amongst heathen philosophers as Christian divines. "I feel" says he, "that I am free, and in this conclusion my reason also concurs; since it is impossible to deny liberty to the will without destroying all merit and demerit, and annihilating every idea of virtue and vice, reward and punishment." But to reconcile contingency of event to the eternal purpose and decree of the divine mind, or even to the simple attribute of prescience, he ingenuously confesses himself to be utterly incapable. "Que nous reste-t-il donc à faire," says he, "qu'à avouer humblement sur cela notre ignorance: qu'à agir avec la même confiance que si tout dependoit de nous, & avec la même humilité que si tout dependoit de Dieu. C'est à quoi se reduisent toutes nos connoissances, & nos recherches; & toutes mes études & mes meditations n'ont pu jusqu'ici me procurer plus de lumières ni me mettre en état de résoudre les difficultés qui trouvent à concilier de vérités que semblent en apparence opposées le unes aux autres."

Thus is the pride of man confounded when he attempts, like the angelic spirits of old, as described by the great epic poet, "to reason high"

"Of Providence, fore-knowledge, will and fate,
 Fix'd fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute,
 And finds no end, in wandering mazes lost."

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The plain unlettered Christian, “who believes in gross,” happily sees none of these difficulties; and where no perplexities occur, no solutions can be wanting. But when a vigorous and comprehensive mind feels the difficulty in its full force, and is unable by its utmost exertions to discover any adequate or satisfactory solution, who does not participate, by sympathy, in its distress? Happy is it when such a mind, in such circumstances as in the present instance, can rely with firm faith and unshaken fortitude on that grand conclusion of natural and revealed religion, that “whatever is is right.” Happier yet, when reason and knowledge form the basis on which that faith is founded; and, to apply the observation to the case now under discussion, when the mind perceives, with grateful conviction, that man enjoys all that liberty, as a moral agent, which is useful or desirable in itself, or perhaps possible in the nature of things: and that if all events are ultimately to be ascribed to God, as the primary and, philosophically speaking, the sole agent in the universe, it only affords an additional and decisive argument, that a glorious consummation shall at length succeed to these sublunary scenes of sin and sorrow; and that so much of evil only is infused into the cup of happiness, as is necessary perhaps to give to it its highest and most exquisite flavour.

In

In the succeeding articles the venerable Confessionalist declares very explicitly his sentiments respecting the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, which appear perfectly rational, clear, and just. "The revealed will of God," says he, "is taught in the Scriptures. It is our duty to endeavour to distinguish between those which are genuine, and those which are either false or of dubious authority: and for this purpose we have no rule different from that by which we ascertain the authenticity of other writings—the uniform concurrence of testimony and tradition. The Council of Trent, therefore, ought not to have declared the books stiled 'Apocryphal' of equal authority with those comprized in the scriptural canon, since they are destitute of this uniform concurrence. With regard to those books, which, from the earliest period, have been invariably transmitted from age to age, as containing the true word of God, it is incumbent upon us to receive them as the rule of our faith and practice, inasmuch as the doctrines and precepts which they contain have the sanction of divine inspiration. For it is simply to these two points that the idea of inspiration properly extends. The aid of inspiration was certainly unnecessary to enable the Apostles and Evangelists to relate what they saw and heard. The most sceptical persons do not refuse to give credit to the historical

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rical accounts of Cæsar or Alexander, because the historians of those celebrated conquerors were not inspired with the knowledge of the facts which they relate. Inspiration then adds nothing to the certainty of facts, and is wholly unnecessary in order to establish the credibility of them. Nay, it may justly be apprehended, that to resort to inspiration for that purpose may operate with some as a motive to reject them, from a suspicion that the plea of inspiration is substituted merely to supply the deficiency of other evidence. To suppose inspiration without utility, is to admit miracles without purpose or propriety—and thus to multiply difficulties and furnish objections to unbelievers, who are sufficiently inclined to reject such miracles as are of real use and necessity. The Prophets were doubtless inspired, because they could have no knowledge of future events but by inspiration. The doctrine of the Gospel was also inspired, because the Apostles received it from Christ, who received it from God himself. But St. John, without having recourse to inspiration, founds the truth of the facts which he records merely upon his own testimony.—“That which we have seen and heard,” says he, “declare we unto you.” And St. Luke advances no higher pretensions to credit than such as arise from his intimate intercourse with those who had been witnesses from the beginning; and
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who possessed, consequently, the best means of information. If these Apostles had imagined that inspiration was necessary to establish the credibility of the facts in question, and had been conscious of such inspiration, they would not have hesitated to say that it was God himself who communicated to them the knowledge of these truths. If, then, any marks of imperfection or inaccuracy should be found in the sacred writings, the truth and certainty of revelation itself would not be in the most distant degree affected by them: nor should we incur less culpability by refusing the credence which its evidence demands."

To these sentiments I have nothing to object, and nothing to add, excepting that the doctrines taught by the Apostles from immediate inspiration appear to have been few, simple, and by universal confession of indubitable certainty and importance—such as the spiritual nature, origin, and design of Christ's kingdom—the redemption of the Gentiles, and their participation in the blessings of the Gospel dispensation—the grand apostacy of the Christian church—its recovery from that apostacy—its universal diffusion throughout the globe; and, above all, the momentous and interesting doctrine of the general resurrection of mankind to a state of impartial and final retribution. It may be also remarked,

that as the Apostles were not inspired with the knowledge of the facts which they record, neither is it reasonable to suppose, that their observations and reasonings upon these facts were dictated by divine inspiration. And if, in any instance, their arguments appear to us weak, or their inferences inconclusive, the truth of the religion which they taught is no more affected by any occasional errors of this nature, than by any inaccuracies or inadvertencies in their historical relations.

“The most respectable authority in matters of religion to Christians,” continues Pere le Courayer, “after the sacred scriptures, is that of the church, or of general councils. The absolute subversion of every regular society must necessarily be the consequence of a refusal to submit to its commands, even when the necessity or utility of these commands are not distinctly perceived or ascertained. In matters of discipline, it is a principle universally acknowledged, that every society has a right to prescribe such regulations as are deemed proper and expedient; and in those regulations, every individual member is under an indispensable obligation to acquiesce. With respect to doctrines indeed the case is different. They rest upon the authority of Christ himself; and the church can neither add to, nor diminish from, the truths which he has taught. So long

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as the decisions of the church are conformable to the sacred scriptures, she may justly lay claim to infallibility as a necessary consequence of that conformity. But if the church ventures to decide upon points of doctrine, respecting which scripture is silent, she departs from that standard which is the sole criterion of this infallibility. And though there does not exist amongst Christians any authority superior to that of the church, to which it may be lawful to appeal, it does not necessarily follow that her decisions can never be erroneous ; since it is essential to the exercise of supreme authority, temporal as well as spiritual, notwithstanding the possibility of mistake, to disallow all exceptions, and to exact an uniform and unreserved obedience. It is therefore an indefectibility rather than an infallibility, which ought to be recognized in the church ; and though errors may sometimes insinuate themselves, it is sufficient that she preserve those fundamental truths which constitute the essence of Christianity, and the practice of the duties of morality, in order to secure the salvation of those who adhere to her communion." As this is the article respecting which the Catholics and Protestants most widely differ, which, in fact, forms that grand line of discrimination, which neither party can ever pass but with instant and remediless ruin to the cause which it defends, it

will not be improper to consider it with some degree of attention. And, notwithstanding the ingenious and elaborate distinctions of the learned writer, it is impossible to discern any essential or practical difference between that indefectibility of the church, which he contends for, and the infallibility which is more generally ascribed to it. In either case, implicit submission to its decrees must be the ultimate and inevitable result. That civil supremacy, to which it is compared, bears no resemblance to it; for civil government is an institution of human origin and appointment, and is founded entirely upon temporal utility. When, therefore, experience evinces that it counteracts, or is inadequate to the end for which it was established, resistance becomes immediately lawful; and the entire subversion of that abused authority, if necessary, is right and just. But as the authority arrogated by the church is a divine authority, it precludes every idea of resistance, and the utmost which can be allowed to its members is a liberty to complain of abuses, which it would be impious to attempt to rectify or redress. If the church, then, is left to reform itself, it is needless to say how hopeless must be the prospect of reformation. In fact, an authority of this transcendant nature manifestly involves in it an innate and progressive principle of corruption and depravity.—

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For when an error is by any means adopted, and established by virtue of this high authority, which the men in whose hands it is vested will, doubtless, be proud and eager to exercise, it will be deemed inconsistent with the dignity of the church, derogatory from its wisdom, and injurious to its power, publicly to revoke what it has once formally and solemnly enacted. The error, therefore, will be incorporated into the general system; and, in a long succession of years, errors and abuses may naturally be expected to accumulate, as we know they actually have done, in the Church of Rome, till the weakness and credulity of mankind can no longer be abused. Common sense, laughing at the charge of impiety, will then re-assume its rights; and the enormous fabric of error, superstition, and absurdity, the laborious toil of ages, may be only the ruin of a day.

The mighty and extensive mischiefs which, by the certain and invariable operation of moral causes, must result from this violent and daring assumption of authority, naturally induce us to enquire upon what basis it is founded. And though it must be acknowledged that the *theory* on which the Catholics build their favourite arguments, in defence of this authority, is very specious and imposing; it has no foundation whatever in fact, or, indeed, so much as the

shadow or semblance of support. Christianity contains a system of religious truths highly interesting and momentous: and its great founder adopted such measures as were doubtless best calculated to diffuse the knowledge of that system, by delegating certain persons to execute the useful and important office of public teachers and instructors of it; and, in imitation of this example, and with a view to the advancement of the same great and benevolent purpose, this order of persons was afterwards continued in uninterrupted succession. But these public teachers of Christianity were not invested with any dominion over the faith or consciences of their fellow Christians. Their province was merely, if we will give any credit to the express declarations of sacred writ, “in meekness to instruct those who opposed themselves; to preach the word with all diligence and in all wisdom; to offer up the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving with lips unfeigned; to reprove, rebuke, and exhort the Christian assemblies over which they presided with all long-suffering, gravity and sincerity; to walk worthy of that high vocation by which GOD had called them into his kingdom and glory; and, if repeated admonitions were found unavailable, solemnly to denounce the exclusion of those from Christian society and communion, who were a manifest and public disgrace to their profession.”

What

What is there in all this to countenance the claim of infallibility, indefectibility, or ecclesiastical authority of any kind? The power of exclusion, or excommunication, is a power inherent in every society as such; and it is not, indeed, so properly an exertion of authority, as an exercise of the right of private judgment. For, to declare an individual member separated from the society is, in fact, nothing more than for the society to separate themselves from him; which no one can question their right to do. This right may, indeed, be improperly exercised; and it by no means necessarily follows, that because a man is excluded from a society, he is therefore unworthy to be a member of it. In certain circumstances exclusion, from even a Christian society, may afford a strong presumption not of guilt, but of superior wisdom, knowledge, and virtue: but the merits of the individual, however great, cannot invalidate the general rights of the society as such; though they may doubtless be adduced in proof of the flagrant abuse of them. The truth is, there does not exist an higher authority in any class of men, to teach or enforce the doctrines of Christianity, than the principles of the Newtonian philosophy. As the religion of Christ is of much more importance to mankind in general than the philosophy of Newton, it must, indeed, excite more of the general

attention of mankind; and more care will, and ought to be taken to inculcate the knowledge of it. But, after all, men must be left to judge for themselves; and infidels in religion are no more amenable to any temporal or spiritual jurisdiction, than infidels in philosophy. The cases are precisely parallel; and, it would be just as rational to acknowledge an infallible or indefectible authority in science as in religion, which is, indeed, a branch, and the most interesting and important branch of science.

If the infallibility of the church is thus destitute of foundation, what shall be said of the papal claim to infallibility, but that it is an extravagance too contemptible to merit any serious confutation? Pere Le Courayer allows that the bishop of Rome is not distinguished from other bishops, excepting by the pre-eminence of his see, and its greater extent of jurisdiction. Of the nature of Episcopal jurisdiction, however, he appears to entertain very erroneous ideas. "Episcopal government," says he, "is so ancient in the church, that we have grounds to believe it originated with Christ himself. The fathers of the second century speak of it as an evangelical establishment, and do not give us any intimation of the novelty of it. To change, without necessity, a government founded upon uninterrupted succession, would argue great rashness

ness and temerity. And, though the salvation of the people does not wholly depend upon the lawful vocation of their pastors, any doubts, as to the validity of their ministrations, must ever be considered as affording much matter of anxiety to timorous minds, which it is proper to obviate by convincing them that their ecclesiastical superiors hold their authority of Christ alone, who ordained them as the ministers of his word and sacraments." This Episcopal authority, on which the good Father lays so much stress, when arrogated as a divine right, is, however, the vainest and most futile of all pretensions. Allowing the distinction between bishops and presbyters to be sufficiently ascertained, does it follow that the plan, originally formed to diffuse the knowledge of Christianity in the world, and which was, doubtless, adapted to the then situation of things, must be extended to all countries, and perpetuated throughout every age? Truth is one. But there may be various modes of communicating the knowledge of it. And, though it is undoubtedly wise and proper, in every case of importance, to make provision for a regular succession of public instructors, yet is it self-evident that every man is entitled to teach who is qualified to teach. And, admitting in its full extent, the claim of Episcopacy to that high antiquity which it is so eager to challenge, to as-

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fert that those only, who are episcopally ordained, have a right to teach the truths of Christianity, is as ridiculous and absurd as it would be to maintain, that a professor of mathematics only is entitled to teach the principles of geometry.

To Pere Le Courayer, doubtless, these plain and simple maxims would have appeared fraught with temerity and danger. Still, however, the learned Father was far from rising to the proper standard of orthodoxy on this head. And it is difficult to conjecture by what salvo this excellent man was able to reconcile the comparative freedom and liberality of his sentiments, on this and various other points, with a conscientious regard to that indefectible authority of the church which he himself admits and maintains, or indeed with any authority at all. If he conceived himself entitled to use his own reason and understanding in forming his opinions on these subjects, and to receive as just and true those decisions only which appeared to him to be so, surely all other Christians must have an equal right to the same liberty: and it is in vain for the church to claim an authority to command, when none are under an obligation to obey. The right of private judgment, if once admitted, is evidently subversive of the very foundation of ecclesiastical authority; of which the council of Trent was doubtless perfectly aware, when in
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such peremptory terms it forbade and condemned the exercise of it. “ Præterea, ad coercenda petulantia ingenia, decernit (synodus) ut nemo, suæ prudentiæ innixus, in rebus fidei & morum, ad ædificationem doctrinæ Christianæ pertinentium, sacram Scripturam ad suos sensus contorqueus; contra eum sensum, quem tenuit & tenet Sancta Mater Ecclesia, cujus est judicare de vero sensu & interpretatione Scripturarum sanctarum, ipsam Scripturam sacram interpretari audeat.”

And respecting the power of the keys, of which the learned Father speaks so freely, or rather contemptuously, as to say, that if excommunication is inflicted by the Pope himself without reason, the Pope himself is the schismatic, the same general council has shamelessly decreed, “ Si quis dixerit sacerdotes qui in peccato mortali sunt, potestatem ligandi & solvendi non habere anathema sit !”

The amazing diversity of sentiments which the catholic church exhibits, notwithstanding the boasted unity of the catholic faith, is strikingly apparent, if we contrast the declarations of Père Le Courayer with the declarations of Cardinal Bellarmine, whose famous assertion respecting the plenitude of the Papal power it is impossible to read without astonishment; and beyond which it may be safely affirmed that human absurdity
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and impiety can no farther go. “Non solum in decretis fidei errare non potest summus pontifex, sed neque in præceptis morum quæ toti ecclesiæ præscribuntur.—Si Papa erraret præcipiendo vitia, vel prohibendo virtutes, teneretur ecclesiæ credere vitia esse bona, & virtutes malas, nisi vellet contra conscientiam peccare.”

It is scarcely necessary to notice some of the succeeding articles of this confession, as they relate to points of controversy, which the venerable writer very justly considers as mere verbal disputes—such as the number of the sacraments, the nature of justification by faith and the merit of good works. It is of little importance, as he observes, what terms are employed, provided that faith and good works are made the grand constituents of the Christian character. The baptism of infants he seems rather to acquiesce in than to approve, “as an antient and allowable, though perhaps not scriptural practice.” But the baptism of infants probably originated in the high ideas entertained in antient times of the *patria potestas*; and if whole households, as we are assured, were baptized in consequence of the conversion of the master of the family, the children surely must be included in this description.

In speaking of the sacrament of the Eucharist, he acknowledges that every article of the Christian doctrine hath undergone alteration, and
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none more so than this. “Christ, in giving the bread and wine as the memorial of his passion and death, declared them to be his body and blood. On this figurative expression is founded the doctrine of transubstantiation. If,” continues he, “it had been said that this change approved itself to the eye of faith, which after the consecration of the elements, saw only the body and blood of Christ, without supposing a real or physical change of substance, there would in this have been nothing contrary to reason, or which ought to have occasioned the least dispute. But in matters of faith, the marvellous is always affected, and the marvellous itself has no charms for the multitude, but in proportion to its contrariety to reason and common sense.” “Aussi cette opinion,” says he, “n’a t-elle pris naissance, que dans des siècles d’ignorance et de ténèbres. Jusque-là on s’étoit contenté de croire qu’en recevant l’eucharistie, on recevoit le corps et le sang de Jésus Christ, mais sans déterminer de quelle manière on le recevoit : ou plutôt persuadés que la grace, ne détruit point la nature on recevoit le pain et le vin ; et on ne doutoit pas qu’en les recevant, on ne recût Jésus Christ lui même parce-qu’il se communique sous les symboles d’une manière ineffable et toute spirituelle.” It is much to be feared that the good Father himself was not entirely exempt from that passion for the marvellous,

marvellous, which he so severely censures in the multitude. Of so difficult attainment is the science of self-knowledge ! These high-flown expressions are certainly not the language of a man who believed the elements of bread and wine to be a memorial, and nothing more than a memorial of the body and blood of Christ. And afterwards, in defending or rather apologizing for the practice of administering the sacrament in one kind only, he says, “ Puisque les protestans croient que Jésus Christ n'est reçu que spirituellement dans l'Eucharistie, il semble qu'il soit indifférent de le recevoir ou sous une espèce ou sous toutes les deux ; puisqu'une présence spirituelle est absolument indivisible ; et qu'on ne peut recevoir Jésus Christ en recevant le pain ou le vin, sans le recevoir tout entier.”

Upon the whole, then, it appears that he admitted, in some general and indefinable sense, a real presence of Christ in the sacrament ; and on this point, as well as respecting the dogma of the Trinity, he could not wholly divest himself of the idea of a somewhat mystical and marvellous.

The sentiments of Pere Le Courayer, with regard to the articles of auricular confession, penances, and indulgencies, are as rational and liberal as can in any degree consist with the most general acknowledgment of the authority of the church. In antient times, when great offenders
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were excommunicated or excluded from the general body of Christians, on account of their misconduct, they could not be restored to Christian privileges and communion without a public confession of their crimes, and such farther reparation and satisfaction as were deemed necessary to ascertain the reality of their repentance. But this, as he observes, bears no analogy to the modern practice of confession, descending to the minutest faults, and reiterated at stated periods. As to indulgencies, though he maintains, and indeed very justly upon his principles, that the church, by whose authority penances were originally imposed, might, in particular cases, also dispense with the observance of them, which is the primary and proper meaning of the term *indulgence*; yet he allows “that this doctrine has been abused to a most astonishing degree—they have been converted into an infamous article of traffic—they have been the means of deceiving and perverting the people, by infusing into them delusive hopes, and a false confidence; and instead of promoting their salvation, they have contributed to plunge them into perdition.”

“The article of images and relics,” says the venerable writer, “has excited great divisions and animosities in the church. Those who have treated them with respect and honor have been taxed with idolatry: those who have demolished them

them have been accused of irreligion and impiety. Images in themselves are harmless, and may be converted both to useful and ornamental purposes ; but it must be allowed that they have been the occasion of great abuses and superstitions. Our conduct in this respect, therefore, must be regulated not so much by religious as by prudential motives. If experience proves the apprehension of abuse to be well-founded, it justifies the suppression of this source of superstition." As to the worship and invocation of the saints, which are, as the venerable Father observes, recommended but not enjoined by the Catholic church, he acknowledges that, however allowable and innocent in themselves, the general practice of the people is grossly superstitious, and differs little from the worship which the heathens paid to their tutelary deities. " The Protestants, indeed," says he, " pretend that this worship is strictly and properly idolatrous, as giving that honour to created beings which is due only to the Creator—that in the state of uncertainty in which we must ever remain, whether they so much as hear our prayers, it is absurd ; and that as we have neither example nor precept for this practice in the word of God, it is unscriptural." And it were much to be wished, the good Father had spared himself that labour
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which he has in vain employed in vindicating it from these imputations.

The custom of reciting divine service in an unknown tongue, Pere Le Courayer allows to be a practice, whatever may be urged in favor of its universality or antiquity, wholly indefensible, and manifestly contrary to general edification. Agreeably to his leading principles, however, he tells us, “ that it would be wrong *to rend the bosom of the church* by a schism, for the purpose of reforming an abuse, which, great as it is, will not authorize a violation of the unity of Christian fellowship.” The same reasoning he applies to various positive rites and institutions of the Romish church, which he confesses to have no virtue or efficacy in themselves, and which are practised only, or chiefly in submission to the authority by which they are enjoined.—The celibacy of the clergy is a positive injunction of this nature; but founded, as the venerable Father thinks, on better grounds than many others. “ The motive,” says he, “ which influenced the church to establish this regulation, was, no doubt, pure and laudable; since it was no other than to detach them more from the world, to render them more assiduous in the discharge of their various duties, and more intent upon the instruction and edification of the faithful committed to their care. The effects have,

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indeed, by no means corresponded with these pious views, and the very strictness and severity of the regulation have been the means of introducing greater and more pernicious disorders than those which it was the object of this celibacy to prevent.

Lastly, the venerable Father declares his sentiments as to the lawfulness of the monastic vows, which he thinks the Protestants have, without sufficient reason, condemned as rash and presumptuous: though the Catholics, on the other hand, he admits, have unduly elevated them to the rank of the highest and most exalted acts of virtue. “If there is,” says he, “rashness and presumption in taking these vows, moved only by some transient feelings of devotion, those are not chargeable with the same faults who act from mature consideration, and after a sufficient time of trial.”—“*En le faisant, il n’y auroit rien que de pieux, et d’estimable dans une vocation qui éloigne une infinité de tentations, que ne laisse presque aucun objet capable de fournir de l’aliment aux passions, et qui en écartant la vue des pompes et des vanités du monde, et en délivrant de ses sollicitudes, ceux qui s’en sont retirés peut leur procurer des moyens plus facile d’aller à Dieu, et d’opérer leur salut en paix.*” If, however, this mode of life be not absolutely unlawful, it must be confessed
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much less laudable and useful than that which is spent in the world in a course of virtuous action; rising habitually superior to temptation, though continually exposed to it.

In conclusion, the venerable writer, after having fully declared his sentiments respecting the great truths of religion, thinks it incumbent upon him to explain himself as to the proper means of conducting men to the knowledge of truth. And here the excellence and benevolence of his heart are displayed in the most striking and beautiful colours. Hearken, ye Protestant bigots! blush and be confounded at the comparison of your own wretched and malignant prejudices, with the generous and enlarged ideas, the noble and animated language of this *Papish Priest*. “I know, says he, but two methods which can be employed for the purpose of propagating truth, persuasion and persecution. As to the latter, nothing appears to me more contrary to the maxims of reason or of religion. Violence is less calculated to advance the cause of religion than to inspire an aversion to it. Having no tendency to enlighten the understanding, it can answer no purpose, but to make men either libertines or hypocrites, and perhaps both. In effect, since religion consists only in a voluntary acquiescence in the truths which reason and revelation inculcate, and in a free and cheerful submission to

what God has enjoined, it is evidently inconsistent with the very nature of it to pretend to subject, without informing the mind. A blind submission of the will is as favourable to error as to truth; and violence certainly cannot enlighten the understanding, for it has no argument to propose. And since the men who employ force are frequently less enlightened than the men upon whom force is employed, it is absurd to suppose that a submission extorted by ignorance from knowledge can either be agreeable to the divine will, or conducive to eternal salvation. If then a blind or timid submission of the understanding is a species of faith which will justify no man, and if violence is inadequate to the production of a more enlightened or rational faith, what other mode of conducting men to truth remains but persuasion? which operates in different ways agreeably to the different dispositions and capacities of men; and by which means Christianity was originally diffused, and by which means only the knowledge and belief of it ought to be preserved and perpetuated. From penal statutes, equally destitute of argument and information, what can be expected but the conversion of cowards into hypocrites and zealots into martyrs. Toleration then has the united sanction of reason and religion: and to urge the civil inconveniences that may possibly result from it, and which
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indeed bear no comparison with those which flow from persecution, is futile and ridiculous, when opposed to the transcendent claims of truth, equity and justice."

In support of these truly catholic and Christian sentiments, may be cited the memorable words of Lactantius, as they stand in the declaration of Pere Le Courayer—words which deserve to be inscribed in letters of gold, and to be engraven in indelible characters upon every heart. "Defendenda religio non occidendo sed monendo; non sævitiâ sed patientia; non scelere sed fide. Nihil enim est tam voluntarium quam religio, in quâ si animus sacrificantis averfus est, jam sublata, jam nulla est!"

ESSAY V.

EXAMEN OF THE KING OF PRUSSIA'S REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION.

AS a striking counterpart to the religious confession of the celebrated Pere Le Courayer, it will now not be improper to enter upon the examination of a system of faith, if such it may be stiled, of a very opposite nature and tendency indeed, but not less remote from the truth, and far more inimical to the general interests of virtue and happiness.

The royal philosopher of SANS SOUCI sets out, like Pere Le Courayer, with an explicit avowal of his firm belief of One Supreme Original Intelligent Cause of all Things. "Le monde entier," says he, "prouve cette intelligence. Il ne faut qu'ouvrir les yeux pour s'en convaincre. Les fins que la nature, s'est proposées dans ses ouvrages, se manifestent si évidemment, qu'on est forcé de reconnoître une Cause Souveraine & Supérieurement Intelligente qui y préside nécessairement. Pour peu qu'on soit de bonne foi il est impossible de se refuser a cette verité." He then proceeds to discuss

cuss the question, Whether religion is not the proper subject of human investigation? And upon this point he advances many arguments in favour of free enquiry, with a liberality of sentiment which would do honor to any man, but which justly excite our admiration as well as approbation, when we consider them as the sentiments of a monarch possessed of despotic authority. “ Plus on examine la vérité plus on la connoit. L'examen & l'attention, sont une prière naturelle que nous faisons à Dieu, pour nous porter à découvrir la vérité. Si la religion Chrétienne est véritable, l'examen nous fortifiera dans sa croyance. Si elle est fausse, quel bonheur pour nous sortir de l'erreur. Ce que nous croyons par préjugé peut être faux ou véritable, & nous ne devons croire qu'il est l'un ou l'autre qu'après un sérieux examen. Non-seulement cet examen est utile puisqu'il peut nous détromper, si nous sommes dans une fausse religion, et nous affermir si nous sommes dans une véritable, mais de plus cet examen est nécessaire et indispensable, car nous n'avons rien que nous intéresse tant que l'éternité. Dans les affaires de conséquence, on veut rendre raison de sa conduite, on ne veut pas agir par hazard. Pourquoi serons nous moins exacts en matière de religion? Celui qui est dans l'erreur et bonne foi et qui n'a pas les moyens d'en sortir, doit espérer en la bonté de

Dieu ; mais celui-la doit trembler qui demeure dans l'erreur parcequ'il ne veut pas s'eclairer faute de soins et de diligence. S'il y a une veritable religion il faut avoir bien peu de justesse d'esprit et être bien insensible au plaisir et à la douleur, pour ne pas examiner une fois la religion avec toute l'attention dont on est capable. Cet examen est necessaire ; il n'est pas possible qu'on n'en retire aucun avantage considerable car la vérité ne craint point l'examen."

Thus far the royal moralist may be accompanied by every rational friend of religion, with satisfaction and pleasure. But when he farther proceeds to explain the nature of the proofs which the true religion ought to exhibit, it is adviseable to pause. He insists, in the first place, "that these proofs should not be of doubtful nature. As religion is itself a matter of high importance, and which demands our utmost circumspection, the proofs by which it is attended ought to be clear, convincing and obvious." "If," says he, "the religion which you offer to my acceptance has no other evidence than such as is common to other religions, equivocal, uncertain, and of abstruse and difficult discussion, I have reason not only to distrust, but absolutely to reject it. If it is the will of God that I should honour him by a particular mode of worship, his goodness, and even his justice are engaged to
manifest

manifest it clearly to me. This is an incontrovertible truth; for it is deduced from the nature of God himself, of which goodness is an essential attribute. Can I impute to him the cruelty of with-holding the clear proofs of his will to me who am submissively disposed to follow it; who enquire and examine merely to ascertain what is truth; and from the apprehension of receiving the delusions of men as divine truths, or of rejecting divine truths as human delusions?" This reasoning, plausible as it may appear in speculation, discovers great inattention to the mode in which the Divine Being actually manifests himself to mankind, and of those analogies upon which we form our ideas of the perfection of the divine nature. That goodness or benevolence, as well as wisdom and power, is an essential attribute of God, the great preponderance of happiness in the universe, and the apparent tendency of the general constitution of things to melioration and improvement, evidently prove. But as we are compelled to confess that this constitution of things in many respects differs very widely from what might have been previously expected by human reason, or rather human ignorance, to proceed from an omnipotent and perfect being, it ought surely to teach us caution in pronouncing what, in particular or definite circumstances, the wisdom and goodness of the Deity absolutely require.

require. That vice should be so frequently in this life connected with happiness, and virtue with misery; and that the virtuous should even be suffered, in certain situations, to incur the extremity of misery as the necessary consequence of their virtue, is, however, acknowledged to be, of all the exceptions against the general system of providence, incomparably the most embarrassing; and we are naturally led to connect the present with a future state of existence as the only mode of solving this grand objection. But, then, it must be confessed that this is little better than an arbitrary conjecture, probable enough, indeed, to excite our hope, but not to warrant a permanent and rational belief: for it is corroborated by no collateral evidence of real weight and solidity, and it plainly stands opposed to the most obvious and striking phænomena of nature. A revelation, then, is necessary in order to ascertain this grand truth, which forms the very basis of religion; and, without the knowledge and belief of which, the difference between Deism and Atheism is merely speculative. Such a revelation Christianity professes to be; and we are not only permitted, but invited to investigate the proofs of its divine original.

“ These proofs,” says the philosophical monarch of Prussia, “ ought not to be in the least degree doubtful.” Not doubtful! Does, then, this
royal

royal philosopher mean, that the evidence of a divine revelation ought to be so forcible and striking, that it should be morally impossible for any one, to whom it was propounded, to refuse his assent? But this is neither agreeable to the nature of man, nor to the analogy of the divine government. Why should we expect, or, indeed, desire such evidence as would, in effect, preclude man from the exercise of his rational and intellectual powers; such overpowering evidence as would fix his attention, totally and exclusively, to the joys or sufferings of a future state, and render him obviously incapable of tasting the enjoyments, or of attending to the necessary concerns of the present mortal and transitory life?

Also, if any degree of doubt or difficulty, in the evidence of a divine revelation, be deemed incompatible with the goodness and justice of God, much more any degree of favor and partiality in the communication of it. A divine revelation, then, ought to be extended over the whole world, and literally preached to every creature. And, if this is admitted, we may with equal reason demand that a perfect equality be established in all other respects, physical and moral; or, that the very same advantages, in the very same degree, shall be enjoyed by creatures participating in the same common nature. But why any distinction of orders in nature? or why should

should not an equality of happiness be established amongst the different orders of being in nature? and, when established, why should it not be increased, and extended?

If we are compelled ultimately to acknowledge our ignorance and inadequacy of comprehension, why scruple this avowal in the first instance? And, instead of pronouncing with that proud positivity, so incongruous with the limited views of man, what degree of evidence a divine revelation *ought* to be accompanied with, it is surely far more reasonable to enquire what degree of evidence it is actually accompanied with. And, if that evidence arises to probability merely, we certainly are not authorized by any principle of reason to reject it on pretence that it is inconsistent with the divine goodness to offer any proof less than absolute certainty. It may, without much hazard, be asserted that a great majority of those who have examined the evidences of Christianity, devoid of previous prejudices against, or of a predetermination to yield to no evidence short of demonstration, have been convinced of the high probability that this religion is of divine original; and, upon this probability, it is right and reasonable to act, even if it were attended with many more doubts and difficulties than those which actually arise from, or which are truly and inseparably connected with it.

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The rectitude and propriety of these abstract reasonings being admitted, we may with more advantage enter into the consideration of the specific objections, urged by the royal sceptic in opposition to the evidence actually adduced in support of Christianity, and which, contrary to the usual practice of infidels in this country, he states with that open ingenuouſness which ſeems to have conſtituted a leading feature in his general character.

It is material to remark that the king of Prussia, though he appears perfectly ſenſible that numberleſs corruptions have been introduced into the popular ſyſtem of Chriſtianity, has never given himſelf the trouble to aſcertain with accuracy in what thoſe corruptions really conſiſt. This is the cauſe of great confuſion and inconſiſtency in his reasonings: for, as his objections are chiefly levelled againſt theſe baſe and ſpurious additions to Chriſtianity, the pure unadulterated ſyſtem itſelf remains not only uninjured but untouched. He even urges thoſe very abſurdities as arguments againſt Chriſtianity which he himſelf elſewhere expreſſly reprobates as the inventions of prieſtcraft, ſeeking to eſtabliſh its dominion on the baſis of human ignorance, ſuperſtition and folly. “ N’eſt il pas ſuprenant,” ſays he, “ de voir dans la religion des perſonnes d’un bon ſens en toute autre choſe tomber de ſang-

fang-froid dans des impertinences, s'habiller de certaine façon, faire des tours, des demi-tours, babiller tout haut, et puis tout bas; badiner avec un morceau de pain, tantôt le montrez tantôt le cacher, ensuite le manger; monter sur un autel, descendre, remonter, faire des gestes, tantôt lents, tantôt prompts." Surely the monarch will not attempt to persuade us that any thing, like this spiritual mummerly, is countenanced by Christianity, or by the example of the first teachers of Christianity. Why is this ridicule, therefore, to be applied as a test of its truth? It is not pretended that St. Paul or St. Peter were accustomed to make upon any occasion either "des tours" or "des demi-tours."

It is true that they were reproached by certain philosophers as *vain babblers*, but they are not said "babiller tout haut et puis tout bas;" nor were they charged by the wise men of Athens with making "des gestes tantôt lents tantôt prompts."—"Jesus Christ n'a enseigné aucun dogme de religion. Jamais il n'a prêché le miracle de sa naissance, il n'a jamais parlé de la Trinité des sacramens, du péché original. Voila pourtant les quatre point fondamentaux de la religion Chretienne." His majesty must mean, of the popular system of Christianity; for if these doctrines are not to be found in scripture, they

they certainly constitute no part of genuine Christianity.

Again, speaking of the Catholic church, and of its arrogant pretensions to infallibility, he says, “ Le progres de l’eglise est tout humain. On a d’abord imposé par un extérieur desintereffé. Quand les rois se sont fait Chrétiens, c’est alors que l’eglise est devenue puissante. Enfin l’eglise s’est emparé de Rome, et se flatte d’avoir droit de commander a l’univers.” For the extravagancies of the church, then, Christianity cannot be responsible ; the monarch himself being appealed to as the judge. “ Les plus anciens peres de l’eglise,” says the royal writer very truly, “ ont introduit dans la religion Chretienne les erreurs de leur philosophie.” And if so, this philosophical monarch would have employed his learning and good sense to very good purpose, in discriminating, amidst this adventitious accumulation of errors, the simple and modest claims of Christianity, before he set himself down to pen a philippic against it. “ La Trinité des Chrétiens n’est qu’un reste du paganisme. Les émanations divines ou plutôt les trois pretendues personnes de la Trinité, ne sont autre chose que les divers rapports sous lesquels les philosophes parmi les anciens concevaient un seul et meme Dieu. Platon, qui n’osait enseigner

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ner publiquement l'unite d'un Dieu, le confideré comme puiffant, comme fage, comme bon. Il en fait trois de tous ces trois égard la puiffance, la fageffe, la bonté. Les anciens pères qui étoient tous difciples de Platon ont porté cette doctrine dans le Chriftianifme ; et ont fait trois perfonnes des trois qualités qui ne conviennent qu'à un feul et même Dieu." But if this Trinity was introduced into Chriftianity from the philofophy of Plato, with what propriety is it filed the Chriftian Trinity? Or how can it be urged as an objection againft that religion of which it is a grofs and notorious perversion?

" It is pretended," fays this royal theologian, " that the firft teachers of Chriftianity fpake with much caution and referve of the divinity of Chrift, and of the holy fpirit, as if they were reftained, from motives of fhame or fear, from divulging the whole extent of their commiffion. But," fays he, " my opinion is, that if they have not explicitly afferted this doctrine of a three-fold Deity, it was becaufe the doctrine itfelf was utterly unknown to them." So far, then, as this royal philofopher, who now ventures his reputation in a field where there is no royal road to victory, is engaged in combating thofe abfurdities, which he himfelf acknowledges to be extraneous to Chriftianity, he cannot furely fuppose, that he is gaining any advantage over
Chrift-

Christianity. He professes, indeed, to lay his axe to the root of the tree ; but as yet he has demolished only a small part of “ *the horrid thorns* ” which impede its growth, and conceal its beauty.

We are now to pass on to another class of objections, in which the monarch appears more in earnest, and which, in his opinion, really affect the credit of the genuine Christian system ; though, in fact, not less foreign to the purpose than those already considered, as proceeding entirely from erroneous ideas of the truths inculcated by divine revelation. “ *Ma raison me dit,* ” says the royal sceptic, “ *que Dieu voit tout ; qu’il est partout ; que conserver c’est agir ; que pour agir quelque part il faut y être ; l’action suppose la présence. En un mot Dieu est partout, et l’écriture me dit que Dieu cherche Adam dans le Paradis : qu’il appelle Adam—“ Adam, ubi es ? ”* Que Dieu se promène dans le Paradis : que Dieu s’entretient avec le Diable au sujet de Job. Ma raison me dit que Dieu ne saurait être sujet à aucune passion ; qu’il doit avoir une prévoyance infinie, et qu’il est éternellement immuable : et religion Chrétienne m’apprend que Dieu parlant à lui même dit ces belles paroles — *Je me repens d’avoir fait l’homme*—que sa colère n’a pas été inefficace ; qu’il la détruit par la deluge. Et comme il n’avait pas prévu que les hommes seraient encore les mêmes, qu’il a con-

servé une famille qui en a produit de tout semblables aux premiers." In reply to all objections of this nature, it is obvious to remark, that Christianity, though it undoubtedly supposes and implies the authenticity and divine origin of the Jewish religion, leaves us the most extensive latitude of judging as to those particulars which are not immediately or necessarily connected with this general acknowledgment. And as to the account transmitted to us of the creation and fall of man, the dispersion of mankind, the general deluge, &c. they may very properly be considered as the ancient and popular traditions of the Jews, blended, agreeably to the stile of Oriental antiquity, with allegorical and hieroglyphical imagery, in which it is neither very easy nor very material to distinguish what is fabulous from what is true. And if any Christian philosopher should even think proper to reject these remote and obscure traditions, as wholly incredible, it would be difficult to prove, that they are so connected or interwoven with the proper evidence of the divine authority of the Jewish and Christian religions, as therefore to render him liable, in any degree, to the charge of inconsistency: though vague and romantic as they may be deemed, it is probable that they were originally founded, like most of the mythological fictions of the Greeks, from which they
 derive

derive strong corroborative evidence, upon real and important facts.

As to the conference which God is represented as holding with Satan in the book of Job, with which the imagination of the king was evidently impressed as a most striking absurdity, for he has repeatedly insisted upon it as wholly contrary to reason and credibility, certain it is that the book of Job has no more connection with Christianity, or even with Judaism, than with the religions of Zoroaster or Confucius. The general design, however, of this justly celebrated relique of Arabian antiquity, is so apparent, that one is tempted to suppose his Prussian majesty could only have perused a few introductory passages of the work, or he would, unquestionably, have been sensible that this pretended absurdity is no more than an allegorical fiction. The great object of this sublime poetical drama is to vindicate the ways of God to man; and the principle of evil is personified under the denomination of Satan, agreeably to the Oriental mythology, in order to obviate the indecorum and impiety of ascribing events, apparently contrary to the perfection of the divine attributes, to the immediate agency of God. And it is farther remarkable, that the existence of this evil being, as a real intelligent agent, is neither an article of the Christian nor of the Jewish revelation; that however

seriously it may have been believed by the generality both of Jews and Christians, it can claim no other credence than is due to an article retained from the antient popular faith, originally founded doubtless on the Manichæan principles embraced by the philosophers of the East.

“ Rien n'est plus absurde que ce que nous dit l'écriture de Jésus Christ qu'il fut tenté par le Diable, qui l'emporta sur une haute montagne et lui fit voir toutes les grandeurs de la terre lui promettant de l'en mettre en possession, “ *Si caddens adoraveris me.*” Que prétend on inferer de cette tentation? Si le Diable connaissait le fils de Dieu, il savait qu'il était plus que lui, maître de tout ce qu'il pouvait lui montrer; et que ses offres seraient vaines. S'il ne le connaissait pas, on est le mérite du fils de Dieu qui est Dieu lui-même, de refuser les dons du Diable, et de ne point succomber à la faiblesse, lui qui est le principe de la vertu? Ce trait de l'écriture est bien extravagant.” Extravagant indeed, if restrained to the literal acceptation. But it is strange that the king should never have been informed that the phrase “ Of the spirit,” *ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος*, manifestly denotes that these unheard of prodigies are merely the particulars of an imaginary or scenical representation, exactly similar to those emblematic and premonitory visions of the antient prophets, which the Jews were never absurd enough
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to mistake for real facts; and of which Maimonides says, “ Know, therefore, that as in an ordinary dream, a man thinks that he hath been in this or in that country, and hath performed such or such actions; even so it is with the prophetic parables as to what the prophets see or do in a prophetic vision. For whatsoever those parables inform us concerning any action the prophet doth, or concerning the space of time between one action and another, or going from one place to another; all this is to be understood symbolically: neither are these actions real to sense. And because this was perfectly well known, it was not necessary, in the rehearsing of every particularity, to reiterate that it passed in a prophetic vision. But now the vulgar think that all such actions, journies, questions, and answers, were really and sensibly performed; though, as he proceeds to demonstrate, contrary to the plainest reason and the authority of all Jewish antiquity.”

It may certainly with as much plausibility be maintained, that St. John speaks of a real fact, when he declares he was carried away *in the spirit*, by an angel, to the summit of a great and high mountain; where he saw that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. Or the prophet Ezekiel, when he tells us that the hand of the Lord was strong upon him, and that he was carried away *in the power of the spirit*, to the

river of Chebar, where he beheld in vision the glory of the God of Israel; as that the Evangelists Matthew and Luke speak of a real fact, when they relate the particulars of a sublime and divinely instructive vision imparted to Christ.

“Supposons encore,” says the philosopher of Sans Souci, “que Dieu eût voulu nous instruire par les hommes il les aurait inspirés. Au contraire, Jésus Christ a laissé ses apôtres dans des erreurs grossières. C’est un fait constant dans l’écriture. Ils ont été tous sujets à l’erreur même après avoir reçu le St. Esprit. St. Paul a convaincu St. Pierre. Ils ont donc pu prêcher chacun séparément des erreurs; et puisqu’ils disputaient sur des faits de religion ils n’étaient donc point également inspirés par le St. Esprit.” This objection plainly originates in vague and confused ideas of Christianity. For certainly it does not follow, because the apostles were divinely commissioned to teach certain truths, that there were no points on which they could possibly differ. And however we may determine respecting those contested questions, it is certain that if we receive as true those doctrines respecting which they ever maintained the most perfect and cordial agreement, our creed will be deficient in nothing which is really essential to the Christian system; which St. Peter sums up with apostolic energy and authority, when he declares, “that the God
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and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his abundant mercy, hath regenerated us unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." If the royal controversialist had conceived of Christianity, as a divine revelation authenticated by the testimony of upright indeed, but frail and fallible men, he would have better known how to distinguish between the imperfections of the first teachers of Christianity, and the imperfection of that religion which they were commissioned to teach.

LASTLY, It will be proper to reply, however, concisely to the most material of those objections, which being neither founded on manifest perverseness, nor egregious misapprehension, are entitled to a candid and dispassionate examination.

1st, The first objection of this more respectable class is, that we cannot depend upon the authenticity of those writings which we regard as the basis of our faith, and the sacred records of our religion. "Quand on ne ferait pas convaincu d'ailleurs que la religion Chrétienne est un pure invention de l'esprit humain, on ne ferait pas dans l'impossibilité de connaître si ce que l'Eglise croit aujourd'hui est la même chose que ce qu'elle a cru autrefois. Quelques Chrétiens des premiers siècles

cles se sont oubliés jusqu'à faire en faveur du Christianisme des suppositions, assez hardies que la plus saine partie des Chrétiens, ont ensuite désapprouvées. Ce zèle inconsideré a produit une infinité de livres apocryphes; faux évangiles, fausse épitres d'apôtres, fausse histoires de leur vie." To this objection, the proper and obvious answer is, that the authenticity of the scriptures stands upon the same foundation with that of all other antient writings; universal consent and uninterrupted tradition. And it would be just as reasonable to reject the Commentaries of Cæsar, as supposititious and undeserving of credit, as the Acts of the Apostles. If fabrications have been attempted for sinister and unwarrantable purposes, they have been long since detected and consigned to everlasting oblivion. And these abortive attempts have only served to prove the early existence of those genuine apostolical writings which they so vainly and foolishly endeavoured to supersede. That the entire canon of scripture may be a literary forgery, is one of those monstrous suppositions which they only can digest who glory in the belief of all unbelief; and who, from their excessive apprehension of credulity, become themselves the most credulous of mankind. These men, who are at once so hard and so easy of belief, may be compared, not improperly, to the giant in Rabelais, who devoured every morning

windmills

windmills for his breakfast, and was at last choaked with a bit of bread and butter. The authenticity of the scriptures is, to say the least, as well ascertained and established by external evidence, as the authenticity of any writings extant of equal antiquity, and cannot for a moment be questioned without adopting principles absolutely subversive of all historical testimony*. The books comprised in the received canon contain moreover the strongest internal marks of genuineness. They exhibit numerous instances of what may be stiled occult and accidental accordance; agreements and coincidencies so remote from all suspicion of design, as to require very close attention and accurate examination to discover; such as it is almost impossible therefore for the most skilful forgery to imitate; such, indeed, as it could never answer the purposes of any impostor to feign, and which imprint upon the whole connected system the stamp of indubitable veracity†.

2dly, The king of Prussia alledges in opposition to the evidence of miracles, “that pretensions of this nature have been common to all religions; that mankind are naturally fond of the marvellous; that they are incredible in them-

* Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History.

† Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.

selves, and totally superfluous; for, as God always acts by the most simple means, he would either inspire us immediately with the knowledge of Christianity, or he would establish at once the truth of Christianity by an express and unequivocal attestation. "God is too just," he adds, "to exact submission to facts of this nature on the credit of human testimony, which is itself so precarious and delusive." And he has the weakness to ask "If men are deceived as to one religion, how can they be assured that they are not imposed upon also in another?" By the exercise of their reason and understanding, undoubtedly. It certainly does not follow, because the fables recorded in the Theogony of Hesiod are devoid of credibility, that the miracles attested by the Apostles and Evangelists must be so likewise. General declamation can avail nothing in opposition to positive proof; nor can the most vehement invective, or the most brilliant raillery, in the least diminish the force of the historical evidence, which is what it is whether we choose to attend to it or not. And, whenever any other religion can produce evidence of a similar nature, and equally well attested with that which Christianity exhibits, it will certainly be incumbent upon us to investigate it with the same philosophical regard and attention.

3dly, The

gdly, The evidence of prophesy the monarch of Prussia represents as not more satisfactory than that of miracles. And he pronounces the prophecies relating to Christianity to be as obscure and ambiguous as the miracles are strange and incredible. “ D’aborde j’observe une grande confusion, un grand embarras des équivoques & des allegories perpetuelle dans toutes leur prophéties. Le sens des plus claires prophéties n’est pas encore déterminé ni parmi les Juifs ni parmi les Chrétiens. Ou est donc le merveilleux des prophéties si elles sont pleines d’obscurités? Quel est donc le caractère qui les distingue des oracles des payens, & des prophéties des autres peuples? Car enfin il y a des propheties partout. Plus les hommes sentent leur faiblesse plus ils veulent en sortir par des prodiges. Enfin les prophéties pour faire quelque impression sur des esprits sains & exempts des préjugés doivent être claires & débarrassées de toutes équivoque. On ne se contente pas de vrai-semblance en matière de science. Pourquoi s’en contenter en matière de religion? Des Cartes ne veut croire que ce qu’il voit clair; ce n’est qu’en matière de religion qu’il se bouche les yeux. St. Augustin dit, ‘ prenez garde de croire savoir une chose si vous ne la connaissez aussi clairement que vous savez que ces nombres, 1, 2, 3, 4, ajoutés dans une somme font dix.”

dix." But surely a rational faith may be founded on a basis of evidence somewhat inferior to mathematical or arithmetical demonstration. And the scriptural prophecies, the attentive and impartial examination of which requires much more learning and leisure than this Julian of the age had to bestow upon them, collectively taken, form a very powerful argument in support of that religion of which Christ was the founder. Though it will be readily acknowledged that many of these prophecies, individually and independently considered, are dark, vague, and of dubious import. And though the royal philosopher affirms that they ought to have been clear and explicit, if they were not actually and originally intended to be so, even the accomplishment of the predictions will not perfectly solve the difficulties with which they are encumbered. Notwithstanding, however, the occasional embarrassment of the critics and commentators, the prodigious force of the general argument derived from these predictions plainly appears, from the utter impossibility of applying them to any man who has ever existed, Christ alone excepted; and with respect to him, the difficulty consists much more in choosing amidst the various ways of explaining and applying the same predictions, than in the impossibility of devising

vifing any fatisfactory or plaufible mode of accommodation.

4thly, This royal philofopher prefumes to charge the fcriptures with exhibiting the Deity in a light grofsly abfurd and injurious. “ Dieu nous donne des commandemens. La religion Chrétienne nous apprend que nous ne faurions les accomplir fans la grace que Dieu donne à qui il lui plait, & cependant Dieu punit ceux qui ne les obfervent point.” Again—“ L’écriture d’un côté dit que Dieu nous damnera fi nous n’obfervons pas fes commandemens, & d’un autre côté que nous ne pouvons rien fans la grace.—*Sine me nihil poteftis facere. Non eft volentis neque currentis, fed miferentis Dei.* Peut on concevoir que Dieu nous puniffe de n’avoir pas fait ce que nous ne pouvons pas faire fans lui? Quoi donc ! Dieu nous dira ici que nous ne pouvons rien fans la grace ; & la il nous maltraitera quand nous n’aurons point executé ce que nous ne faurions faire fans lui. Et il nous fera des reproches tendres et nous dira qu’il n’a pas tenu à lui qu’il ne nous ait donné tous les fecours néceffaire. *Quid potui facere vineæ meæ et non feci ? Perditio tua ex te Ifrael.* Que de contrariétés !” Without attempting to unravel all the intricacies of fcholaflic theology, refpecting the obftinately controverted queftions of grace, juftification, and

and free-will, it may be remarked, in general, that the language of scripture is consonant to the language of devotion, the language of philosophy, and the language of common sense. God is uniformly represented as the grand source of agency, as well as the sole dispenser of happiness. Nothing, therefore, can be effected without the divine aid and energy. But, then, this aid will be invariably imparted to those who seek it with humility, faith, and perseverance. And though God is assuredly not described as a capricious or partial being, but as diffusing the blessings of his providence and grace in the use of natural and appointed means: yet if those means are not resorted to, man is justly condemned, not for failing to effect what he has it not in his power to accomplish, but for neglecting or despising those means of moral improvement which he actually possesses, and which, in the established course of nature and providence, would have been infallibly crowned with the divine blessing; and if this is wanting, reason and revelation concur to assure us, that no means will avail to render men either truly virtuous, or permanently happy. If subtle and refined objections, leading to deep metaphysical disquisitions, be raised against this general statement of Christian principles, the objectors are, no doubt, capable of comprehending, and they
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may easily furnish themselves with the proper philosophical and metaphysical solutions.

5thly, Another objection to Christianity, of a nature still more extraordinary, imports that this religion is injurious to civil society, as inculcating an habitual contempt of riches, of temporal grandeur, of power, of pleasure. "In a word," says the philosopher of Sans Souci, "the Christian religion condemns every thing which has a tendency to gratify the senses, or to render the present life agreeable and happy. These she stiles the pomps and vanities of the world, and includes them all in the general description, *Concupiscentia oculorum, concupiscentia carnis, superbia vitæ*. La religion Chrétienne," says this Christian monarch, "est très nuisible a la société civile. On peut remplir les devoirs d'un bon citoyen, d'un bon ami, d'un bon parent; en un mot, d'un honnête homme independamment du culte qu'on dit que nous devons a Dieu; comme d'entendre la messe, de fréquenter les sacramens, de croire la Trinité, l'incarnation, &c." It must be acknowledged indeed, that if Christianity consists merely in hearing mass, in frequenting the sacraments, in believing the doctrine of the Trinity, of the incarnation, &c. it may well be pronounced useless to society. It is true, however, as the monarch himself is pleased to add, that there are those who have *pretended* that

that to fulfil the duties and obligations of civil and social life is itself a part of religion: and that religion enforces the practice of those duties by motives superior in their nature and efficacy to all others. The great founder of our religion has himself inseparably connected the obligations of morality with the duties of religion, by declaring, that the first commandment is to serve the LORD our GOD with all our hearts, and the second to love our neighbour as ourselves. Indeed universal benevolence is so obvious and distinguishing a characteristic of Christianity, that the blindest prejudice only can pronounce it inimical to human happiness, whether it be true or whether it be false. “Chose admirable!” says M. Rousseau, “la religion Chrétienne, qui ne semble avoir d’objet que la félicité de l’autre vie, fait encore notre bonheur dans celle-ci.” And it is certain that in the adoption of means to accomplish this great end, Christianity differs nothing from just philosophy. Does not philosophy, as well as religion, assure us that man’s supreme good consists not in riches, in honour, or in pleasure; for of all these a man may be possessed and yet feel himself miserable; but in the cultivation of those dispositions of mind which are in their own nature productive of a calm and equable, a permanent and rational enjoyment. Philosophy also teaches us, that the
general

general happiness is most effectually advanced by the mutual sacrifice of individual interest. But religion only exhibits motives of sufficient force to enable men cheerfully, or indeed rationally, to make the requisite sacrifices of private to public happiness. And when religion is entirely renounced, we plainly perceive, by the king of Prussia's delineation of his own principles, how much the highest minds are degraded by the want of it, and how ill morality can support itself without its aid. "In the contemplation of the Deity," he affirms, and justly affirms, "that whatever is, is right." But forgetting that the rectitude of the general system involves in it the ultimate triumph of virtue and destruction of vice, he presumptuously infers that it is contrary to the divine nature to inflict any kind or degree of punishment; and declares it to be inconsistent with his perfections to place any created beings in situations which would eventually cause them to give him any real offence, or to violate the order and harmony of the divine government. Remorse, therefore, as a religious sentiment, he represents as the mere effect of prejudice and folly. We have nothing to hope, nothing to fear from God, who will neither reward the good, which he himself bestows, nor punish the ill which he himself permits. Nothing is good or bad but as it

relates to individuals, and this distinction cannot extend to the Supreme Being, infinitely exalted as he is above the highest of his creatures. A victory in war, for instance, is good as it relates to the conquerors, but bad as it relates to the vanquished. To God it is neither one nor the other. How many families are ruined and undone amongst our enemies," says this cool victor-logician, "by the very same means which with us occasion public rejoicings!" Such is the morality which the royal philosopher of Sans Souci pronounces more favourable to the happiness of mankind, than that which requires a perpetual interchange of friendly and benevolent affections.

6thly, There is one objection more, to which a very few words may suffice in reply: viz. "That the testimony of the numerous martyrs to Christianity, upon which so much stress has been laid, is no proof of the truth of that religion, for the sake of which they sacrificed their lives; because no religion, however extravagant, is without its martyr. Before martyrdom, therefore, can be urged as a proof of Christianity, some criterion must be devised in order to distinguish the true martyr from the false. For the fathers of the church themselves allow it to be an axiom in religion, *Causa martyrem facit non pœna*. So that
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it is plain Christianity must prove the martyrdom to be genuine, before the martyrdom can prove Christianity to be true."

Undoubtedly it must be admitted, that martyrdom is in itself no proof of the truth of any speculative principles whatever. But on the other hand, it must be acknowledged the most satisfactory demonstration of the sincerity of those who voluntarily submit to it. Now it is certain, that from the first origin of Christianity, there have not been wanting those who were ready to seal their confessions with their blood. But it must be remembered, that Christianity is a religion professedly founded on facts; such as the miracles, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the apostolic powers uninterruptedly exercised for a long series of years. The difficulty, therefore, is to explain how the primitive martyrs to Christianity could be deceived as to these facts. Their sincerity we are not at liberty to question, and if they really and sincerely, though falsely, believed that these mighty works were done, by what hypothesis probable or possible shall we account for this wonderful persuasion? Certainly so general and so permanent an infatuation could amount to nothing less than a miraculous delusion. And if we must at last be constrained to admit the reality of a supernatural intervention,

all impartial and rational persons would surely chuse to embrace, of the two systems, that which is supported by an astonishing accumulation of evidence, approving itself also by its own innate excellence and dignity, rather than that which, not pretending to comparison in a moral view, is merely arbitrary, hypothetical, and gratuitous.

ESSAY VI.

OF UNITARIANISM.

WHEN we contemplate the admirable simplicity of the Christian religion, the nature of those plain though momentous truths which it inculcates, and the mode in which it was originally promulgated, we cannot but be struck with amazement that the vast fabric of error, superstition and absurdity, which the greater part of Christendom still reveres as the true Apostolic and Catholic church, could ever have been erected on so disproportionate a basis. For many ages the whole Christian world appeared to be involved in the thickest shades of intellectual darkness, till at length the morning of the reformation began to dawn. The horizon nevertheless was still greatly overcast, but we have now the satisfaction to perceive the clouds gradually dissipating, and the time visibly, however slowly approaching, when the sun of truth shall appear in meridian strength and beauty. Much indeed was at that period effected by the exertions of those great men, who were destined to begin the arduous work of restoring the Christian religion to its original simplicity and purity.

But they were by no means sensible of the full extent and magnitude of the evil which they were desirous to remedy. And without supposing their minds miraculously enlightened, it was indeed morally impossible that they should by a single effort be able entirely to emancipate themselves from that enormous load of prejudice and error, which had been gradually accumulating for a long succession of ages. The fact is, that they retained in the new system, established upon the ruins of the antient faith, many of its most pernicious dogmas, as well as its grossest absurdities. But of all the errors with which they were chargeable, that which was attended by consequences incomparably the most fatal, was the presuming to claim a right of imposing this system upon the consciences of their fellow Christians. Did Luther with such unparalleled intrepidity and success attack the usurpations of the Papal chair, only to assume the exercise of the Papal prerogatives in his own person? Was Calvin crucified for us, or were we baptized into the name of Melancton? By these means, however, a most formidable barrier was opposed to the farther progress of reformation and improvement: and the errors of Protestantism in consequence struck almost as deep a root, and by succeeding reformers were found scarcely less difficult to eradicate than those of Popery itself.

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Amongst the principal of those errors, many of the most learned, zealous, and intelligent Christians have not scrupled to rank the doctrine of the Trinity. And notwithstanding the combined support of the spiritual and temporal powers, the impresson made by the arguments of its opponents is such as justly to create the alarm and apprehension of its advocates. In the gradual extension, however, of religious and philosophical enquiry, not merely the proper Deity of Christ, and the absolute equality of the Son and Spirit to the GOD and FATHER of ALL, were rejected as doctrines destitute of the slightest foundation in reason or scripture, but even the pre-existence of Christ was affirmed to be a notion equally groundless. And men the most eminent for integrity, learning and ability, have declared their firm conviction, that Christ assumed no higher or more exalted character than that of Prophet of the MOST HIGH; that he was neither of angelic or super-angelic origin, but strictly and properly, in the apostolic language of St. Peter, “ a man approved of GOD,” by signs and wonders which GOD did by him. The grounds of this persuasion, so contrary to the commonly received opinions relative to the person and dignity of Christ, may be properly comprised under three general heads—Arguments deduced from Reason, Scripture, and Antiquity.

The doctrine of the Trinity has often been alleged to be, in its own nature, incapable of proof. To affirm that there are three persons, each of whom is possessed of all divine perfections, i. e. each of whom is perfect God; and, at the same time to maintain that they constitute not three Gods, but one God, is a gross and palpable contradiction; the truth of which not the united testimony of men and angels could ever be sufficient to establish. If, upon the extravagant supposition, therefore, that this should be actually asserted upon the authority of miracles themselves, it would be impossible to believe; we could only feel ourselves lost in astonishment. This, however, it must be acknowledged, is not strictly true with regard to that system which represents Christ, not as the second person in this incomprehensible Trinity, but as a distinct and subordinate being, though of a nature transcendantly exalted and glorious; as sustaining the characters of Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe; as exercising, therefore, in virtue of that authority which he derives immediately from God, almighty power from eternal ages; the effect in this instance being affirmed coeval with the cause, as the rays of light are coeval with the sun. That it should be necessary or expedient for a being, invested with this ineffable glory and majesty, to cast aside his most divine array, and
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wrap his Godhead in a veil of flesh and blood, is a doctrine at which reason so forcibly revolts, that, if it is calmly reflected upon, it can never be adopted upon any evidence of which it is even possible to conceive the fallibility. When we contemplate the vast, the boundless extent of creation; the innumerable worlds, systems, and systems of systems which it contains; this terrestrial globe and all which it inherits must appear to us as less than a grain of sand upon the sea-shore; and we feel ourselves almost annihilated in the consciousness of our own insignificance. That the mighty Maker of the universe should become incarnate, and suffer death upon the cross in order to atone for the sins of mortal men, is a monstrous idea: such as cannot, and ought not to be supposed true, if the religion, which is said to teach so extravagant and incredible a doctrine, can, with less violence to reason and probability, be deemed false, or its genuine sense and meaning perverted by erroneous interpretations.

The truth of Christianity, therefore, being presupposed, let us proceed to consider the scriptural evidence upon which this enormous faith is founded. And surely, as it is a doctrine so new and strange, so remote from all our preconceived ideas of reason, it is natural to expect that it should be expressly and explicitly taught,
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if not by Christ himself, at least by the Apostles immediately commissioned by him to promulgate the great truths and mysteries of the gospel. It is universally acknowledged, that the Jews entertained no idea that the Messiah was destined at his appearance to assume any higher character than that of a man. A great temporal prince and conqueror they certainly expected; and we plainly perceive with how much difficulty this prejudice was eradicated from the minds, even of the most sincere converts to Christianity. But it does not appear, from the evangelical histories, that they expressed the least surprise at the communication of the sublime and mysterious doctrine respecting the divine or super-angelic nature of Christ. Nay, the most zealous of its advocates may be safely challenged to produce a single passage in those histories which can, with the least colour of plausibility, be supposed written with the primary and express design of inculcating that doctrine, the introduction to St. John's gospel excepted; which was not written for many years after those of the other Evangelists; which certainly professes not to teach any novelty, and which is very easily capable of another, and more rational interpretation. In the Apostolic epistles, also, the utmost that can be pretended is, that this sacred mystery is occasionally hinted at, or alluded to, but no where is it expressly and unequivocally

unequivocally taught. Nor does there appear any symptoms in the Christian church, at this period, of that inexpressible awe and amazement which a discovery of this nature could not fail to excite. And whatever judgment may be formed of a comparatively inconsiderable number of passages, obscured by the use of Jewish idioms, and Oriental modes of phraseology highly figurative and tropical, it cannot but be acknowledged that Christ is usually represented, even in the writings of St. Paul himself, as a man distinguished from all other men, not by the superiority of his nature, but by the dignity of his office. He is styled by that Apostle, “the man whom God ordained.” He observes, “that as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” And he expressly asserts that “there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus.” The future exaltation of Christ is uniformly asserted to be the reward of his services and sufferings on earth; but, if the glories of his pre-existent state were such as have been described, what can this reward mean; or what addition of power or of dignity could he possibly receive? Throughout the whole of the New Testament, no use is made of this extraordinary doctrine of an incarnate God; no argument is grounded upon it, no necessity is alleged or pretended for it,

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And the meek and lowly language of Christ himself is, “that of his own self he could do nothing.” “That the words which he spake were not his own, but his Father’s who sent him.” And “that his Father within him did the works.”

If we permit ourselves properly to reflect upon these considerations, it will be impossible not to admit, that the general tenor of scripture is not only unfavourable to, but absolutely incompatible with, the ideas usually embraced of what is styled the doctrine of the *incarnation*; a term not to be found throughout the entire canon of scripture, and the novelty of which is itself a proof of the novelty; *i. e.* the falsehood of the opinion which it was invented to express. Certainly, we may venture to affirm, that a doctrine of this high and transcendent nature, which is never expressly taught, can never be incidentally alluded to. And if, with candor and impartiality, we endeavour to ascertain the genuine meaning of those passages which are usually adduced in support of it, we shall soon be convinced, how very few there are which contain any real difficulty. And it is very certain, that a construction which may at first strike us as harsh, forced, and unnatural, will frequently appear, when we become familiarized to it, not only just, but easy and obvious. It is very remarkable, that
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the figurative sense of the passage, "*This is my body,*" seemed to Luther so violently strained, that he could never prevail upon himself to relinquish the doctrine of the real presence; though he was sensible, as he tells us, that by this means it was in his power to give a great blow to Popery. "*Mais je suis enfermé,*" says he, "*je ne puis me dégager: les paroles du texte sont trop forte. Ceci est mon corps, ceci est mon sang: & rien n'est capable de les ôter de mon esprit.*" Indeed, all the numerous disputations between the Protestants and Papists, relative to this subject, concur to prove, that a topic of controversy, supposed by men distinguished for their learning and talents to be involved in inextricable difficulties, such as no human sagacity would, as they doubtless imagined, ever be equal to the solution of, may be in itself one of the clearest and plainest of all questions. And this the Unitarians affirm to be likewise true, as to the controversies respecting the divinity and incarnation of Christ. And upon these interesting points the argument from antiquity, of which it is now proposed to exhibit a very general view, reflects also, as they apprehend, great additional light.

It is perfectly well known, that at the commencement of the Christian æra, and for several centuries preceding as well as succeeding that
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period, the Platonic system of philosophy was almost universally prevalent; the original principles of which may be clearly traced back to their undoubted source, in that celebrated Oriental system, which, from the earliest antiquity, was adopted by the sages of Hindostan, and which is maintained by them, with little variation, to the present day. For many years after the first promulgation of Christianity, notwithstanding the unquestionable existence of Unitarian principles, it evidently appears, that the only tenets avowed by the professors of that religion, which excited any degree of general alarm, or to which the appellation of *heresy* was ever applied, were those of the Gnostics, the principal leaders of whom were ambitious of distinguishing themselves as men of refinement and speculation: who were desirous of doing honor to Christianity, by blending it with the principles of that vain philosophy to which they were previously and extravagantly attached. Considering it as an incontrovertible axiom, that matter was in itself base and vile, and the primary source of all evil; and that the soul, or intellectual principle, was an effluence or emanation from the divine essence; they contended that this principle, in Christ, was a celestial emanation of the highest order and dignity; and that though Christ appeared in form and fashion as a man, this appearance

ance was altogether delusive, being the mere insubstantial semblance of a human body, which this celestial intelligence, or *Æon*, to use the philosophical term, condescended to assume during his residence on earth. The real Christ, therefore, neither suffered nor died; and the ignominy of the cross could be no longer the subject of reproach. They also, in perfect consistency with their general principles, opposed the doctrine of a resurrection; regarding it, in the person of Christ, as a miraculous delusion of the senses; and asserting it to be true, as to Christians in general, only in a figurative sense, as denoting the commencement of a life of holiness and virtue: and that the soul, being in its own nature immortal, would continue to exist after the dissolution of the body, which they regarded not merely as an useless, but disgraceful incumbrance. This system, which was daringly advanced even in the apostolic age, is repeatedly animadverted upon, in the apostolic writings, with great severity and indignation; and authoritatively condemned by them, as a gross and manifest corruption of the simplicity of the gospel. St. Paul exhorts Timothy “to shun profane and vain babblers, whose word will eat as doth a canker, of whom is Hymenæus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying, that the resurrection is passed already,

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and overthrow the faith of some." And again, "Avoid foolish questions and genealogies;" alluding, probably, to the intricate and idle disputes prevailing amongst these philosophers respecting the generation of the different orders of *Æons*. "A man that is an heretic," and Gnosticism, as far as the history of opinions can be traced, was the sole heresy of the times, "after the first and second admonition reject." St. Peter apparently alludes to the same class of professing Christians, when he speaks of those "who brought in damnable heresies, denying the Lord, that bought them." And a great part of St. John's first and second epistles consists in vehement exhortations and exclamations against these fantastical and dangerous notions; borrowed, indeed, from the fashionable philosophy of the times, and presenting to the men of refinement in that age a most splendid and captivating aspect. "That which was from the beginning," says the Apostle, obviously alluding to the denial of the true and proper corporeality of Christ, "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life, that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.—Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false teachers are gone out into the world.

world. Hereby know ye the spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God. And this is the spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and now already is it in the world." It is reasonable to believe, that the farther diffusion of the then inviting and specious, but now exploded notions of Gnosticism, was effectually restrained by the influence of these salutary and seasonable admonitions, and that the generality of Christians escaped the contagion of this pernicious heresy. Unfortunately, however, after an interval of no very long duration, opinions originating in the same system of philosophy, and equally remote from the purity and simplicity of the religion of Jesus, were revived and propagated with far greater success; insomuch, that they were, by degrees, completely incorporated into the popular system of Christianity, where they still retain their place; and are even at this day regarded as the pillars of the orthodox and Catholic faith.

PLATO, after the example of the Oriental philosophy, maintained the existence of three distinct principles in nature: the Supreme Being, whom he styles *αγαθον*, or "the Good;" the divine mind, or intellect, distinguished by the appella-

tions of *υες* or *λογος*; and lastly *κοσμος*, or the visible material system. Such is the impenetrable darkness and obscurity which pervade the writings of this celebrated ancient, that it is impossible to ascertain whether he really meant to inculcate the doctrine of three originally distinct intelligent principles, or, which is more probable, of one omnipotent agent, distinguished by different names, and represented under different modifications. The learned Cudworth, indeed, has asserted, that Plato, in his second epistle to Dionysius, mentions a trinity of divine hypostases: but it is not easy to infer this from the following quotation from that epistle, which is, however, supposed to be the passage alluded to, as the best authority for his assertion which it affords: “ *Περὶ τῶν παντῶν, &c.* All things are about the King of all: and all things are for the sake of him, and he is the author of every thing that is fair and good: but the second about the second, and the third about the third. The mind of man may stretch itself to learn what these things are, looking at those which resemble them, of which none do it sufficiently: but with respect to the King, and the things of which I speak, there is nothing like them.” *Epist. ad Dionysium*, II. p. 670. It is certain, however, that if Plato himself did not believe the real existence of three distinct intelligent principles,

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this “ Academic Angel,” as Maximus Tyrius styles him, in the rapture of admiration, frequently expresses himself in such highly figurative and mystical language, respecting the properties or energies of the λογος, or divine intellect, and the ψυχη κοσμου, or soul of the universe, as was obviously calculated to perplex and mislead the imaginations of his disciples.

Philo, the learned Hellenistic Jew, in particular, who flourished in the apostolic age, being a profound adept in this philosophy, and regarding it with great admiration, attempted, with wonderful success and applause, to incorporate it with that religion, to which he retained a zealous attachment. Arguing, therefore, on the platonic idea, that the υς, or λογος, was an intellectual principle, distinct from, though intimately and mysteriously connected with the αγαθον, or το εν, “ the Good,” or “ the One,” from whom it proceeded, and to whom it was subordinate ; he boldly maintained, that this Logos was the medium of all the divine communications recorded in the sacred writings. Angels and prophets, therefore, he considered as acting under the immediate influence and inspiration of this divine energy ; and the Messiah himself, agreeably to this theory, would be distinguished from all the preceding prophets only by possessing a double portion of the same spirit. In the magnificent

language of Platonism, Philo styles the *Logos*, or the divine power and wisdom actually personified, “ that super-celestial star which is the source of the visible stars, and from which they derive their respective splendors.” And deeming any species of active exertion inconsistent with the ineffable nature and dignity of the Supreme Being, who was supposed to be continually absorbed in the contemplation of his own perfections, the *Logos*, which was said to flow from the divine essence as a river from a fountain, or as the beams of light from the sun, was represented as a kind of secondary power or principle: the *δημιουργος*, to whom was delegated the mighty task of forming, preserving, and governing the intellectual as well as visible and material universe.

This being the general state of philosophical opinions, or of those mystical reveries worthy of a Behmen or a Swedenborg, which were dignified with that appellation, the effects produced by these opinions, upon the pure and genuine system of Christianity, could not but soon become apparent. Those early converts to Christianity from Heathenism, who appertained to the higher classes of life, and who had been educated in all the learning of the times, notwithstanding their change of religion, still retained their predilec-
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tion for that system of philosophy with which they were, before their conversion, so much enamoured*. This predilection, which they inherited

* Let those, who affect to hold all metaphysical investigations with contempt, take the trouble to compare the writings of Locke, Hartley, and Hume, with the barbarous jargon, current in the School of Plato; and then, if they please, deny its utility and importance. Metaphysics, having an inseparable connection with ethics, ethics with politics, and politics with every department of civil and social life, it is, indeed, impossible to estimate the full extent of their influence. If the quotations in the text do not sufficiently display the darkened state of the human understanding, while under the dominion of these wild chimæras, we may take a farther lesson from Plotinus, one of the most celebrated Platonists of antiquity: "As the divinely solitary principle of things," says this admired commentator, and *interpreter* of the doctrines of Plato, "is perfectly simple, it necessarily follows, that he must be perfectly sufficient and perpetually exuberant. Hence, he must be a producing cause; and that which he first produces must be the most similar of all things to himself: and this is no other than intellect. Now this intellect, on account of its perfect similitude to THE ONE, contains all multitude in occult and in distant union; for, it is requisite that multitude should exist occultly, before it is scattered abroad and diffused into separate forms; and that it should be concealed in the profound recesses of intellect, before it emerges into the diffused splendors of multitude, perfectly divided and distinct: just as the duad is posterior to unity, and contains number without being perfect number itself. But, as it is necessary that this occult multitude should be perfectly diffused, in order to the actual diversity of things, and the existence of the sensible world,

herited from their ancestors, appears to have descended in full force to their successors. Justin Martyr confesses himself " charmed with the Platonic doctrine of ideas." " The Greek philosophy," says Clemens Alexandrinus " cleanses the mind and prepares it for the reception of faith." And Minucius Felix pronounces it " in its general principles nearly co-incident with Christianity." Athenagoras publicly taught the Platonic philosophy at Alexandria. And Austin, who in ability rose perhaps superior to all his cotemporaries, and who was in learning second only to Jerome, acknowledges that he was reconciled to the doctrine of the Trinity by reading the works of Plato; that otherwise he should have embraced the doctrine of Photinus, and have thought Christ a mere man. He even goes

world, hence a third procession originates, in which multitude no longer subsists, in indivisible union, but proceeds from the sanctuary of intellect into absolute diversity and separation. And this third principle is no other than soul, which expands the impartibility of intellect, and unfolds all that was involved in the unity of intellectual perception. Besides these, there can be no other principle; for, after the cause by which multitude is perfectly evolved, nothing but the gradation and diversities of multitude can subsist." If there is no merit in breaking the bonds of that intellectual thralldom, in which the human mind had been for 2000 years captivated, then let the name of Locke be blotted out of the catalogue of illustrious men, and his immortal work be consigned to disgrace and oblivion.

so far as to say that, “ by changing a few words and sentences, the Platonists would become Christians, as many of them of later times have done.” And he expressly informs us, that in divers Platonic treatises, he had met with St. John’s doctrine of the *Logos*, “ non quidem,” to use his own words, “ his verbis, sed hoc idem omninò multis et multiplicibus suaderi rationibus quod in principio erat verbum, &c.”

The learned and philosophical Christians, therefore, proceeding upon the complex supposition that the religion of Jesus was true, and that the philosophy of Plato was also true, thought themselves, doubtless, very usefully and laudably employed in reconciling these two schemes, and in blending their religious and philosophical theories into one general system. As the *Logos* was acknowledged to be the grand medium of communication between God and his creatures, and was frequently spoken of as a divine power or attribute, as well as agent, it was easy to advance, without exciting any very general alarm, as Justin Martyr ventured, and perhaps first ventured to do, that the divine *Logos* being extended to, and actually dwelling, or residing in the man Christ Jesus, it was of the essence of the Catholic faith to maintain, that in his person the divine and human natures were conjoined in strict and indissoluble union. For, in explaining this assertion,

he hesitated not to say, “ that the philosophy of the Greeks was inspired by the same *Logos*: that all the truths, taught by sages and legislators, were discovered by this *Logos*: that Socrates was possessed of a portion of the same *Logos*; which displayed itself in various forms, which was communicated in different degrees for different purposes; and which was, indeed, no other than the wisdom, the power, and glory of him by whom it was generated.” If the generality of plain unlettered Christians presumed to guess at the meaning of this mystical jargon, certainly all they could infer from it would be, that Christ was a prophet not distinguished from other prophets, except by peculiar manifestations of the divine favour; that the power, the wisdom, and the glory of God, were most conspicuously displayed in the person of Christ; and that they might, in this sense, be said to rest upon him, and to reside in him. And, in this sense, it must have appeared perfectly consistent with the famous declaration with which St. John introduces his gospel, *Εν αρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος*, &c. That aged and venerable Apostle perceiving, doubtless, the prevailing attachment to the Platonic system, and, probably, apprehensive that the admired and favourite hypothesis of the personification of the *Logos* might, by Christian philosophers, be applied to Christ in the same mystical sense

sense as it had already been by Philo and other Jewish Platonists to the preceding prophets; nay, perhaps, knowing this to be actually the case, takes occasion, expressly and plainly, to declare, that the *Logos* was not a distinct intelligent principle, but that it was no other than God himself, or the divine wisdom operating from eternity, in the execution of the divine purposes, and shining with peculiar lustre and glory in the great work of redemption: thus raising, as it should seem, an insuperable barrier against the progress of the dangerous opinion respecting the distinct personal existence of the *Logos*. But truth, reason, and common sense, had long since vanished in the general rage of philosophizing; and means were easily found to obviate this difficulty. The *Logos*, by all the Platonists, was spoken of, without any scruple, as a power or attribute of the Supreme Being: but then they affirmed, that what was predicated of the divine essence must be understood also of his powers; for the divine essence and energy were synonymous; and that the *Logos*, though a power, possessed an eternal and divine essence, and consequently a distinct and proper subsistence. “The *Logos* of God,” says Origen, “is unlike that of all other persons. No other *Logos* is living; no other *Logos* is God; no other *Logos* was in the beginning with him whose *Logos* it was,”

was." "The breathings of God," says Lactantius, "have a permanent existence and essence; because he is immortal, and is the giver of essence and life." The Christian Platonists, therefore, were perfectly satisfied that St. John had affirmed nothing inconsistent with the principles of Platonism. For as they maintained that the *Logos* was both essence and attribute; as they affirmed that this principle was of the same substance with the Father, though possessed of a distinct subsistence, they inferred from St. John's own declaration, that Christ, or the *Logos*, which, by an easy figure, was said to be made flesh, was, truly and properly, God; thus boldly ascribing to the Apostle their own wild conceits and exquisite absurdities. And as they transferred, with the same facility, this mode of reasoning, if such it can be stiled, to the Holy Spirit, the *αγιον πνευμα*, so frequently mentioned in the sacred writings, and which was acknowledged to be also an attribute denoting the power or energy of the *λογος*, expressed the understanding or wisdom of the Father, in about 300 years after the death of Christ, in consequence of a decree of the Council of Nice, ratified and confirmed by the sovereign will and pleasure of the Emperor Constantine, the Catholic doctrine of a Trinity of hypostases, in one divine essence, was finally established.

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This triumph of Platonism over Christianity did not, however, as the advocates for Unitarianism allege, take place, without a very long and violent opposition, which at different times and in different stages of orthodoxy displayed itself in various modes and forms. It will be proper to add a few observations which may throw a ray of light, however faint, upon this part of the subject.

It is urged as a fact most remarkable and important, that the antient Jewish Christians, who were distinguished from the Gentile converts, by the names of Ebionites or Nazarenes, are acknowledged to have been, without exception, Unitarians, and in this faith they abided so long as they had any existence as a Christian church. And it appears, from a great variety of evidence, that the majority even of the Gentile Christians were also, from the earliest times, believers in the proper humanity of Christ; and that it continued to be the prevailing and popular creed for several centuries. The fathers of the church, unable to controvert the fact, endeavour to account for it by such means as they judged least unfavourable to the credit of the orthodox system. The solution which seems to have afforded them most satisfaction was, that the sublime doctrines of the pre-existence and divinity of Christ were inculcated by the Apostles with great caution and reserve, lest the reception of Christianity it-

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self should be impeded by them: as the minds of the multitude were too gross to apprehend and digest doctrines of so recondite and mysterious a nature. Chrysostom says, "that the doctrine of Christ's incarnation not being taught at first, it was proper for the Apostle John to dwell upon it, and from things gross and sensible gradually to ascend higher. He it was," says the holy Father, "who first lighted up the lamp of theology." Athanasius affirms, "that not even the blessed disciples themselves were fully persuaded concerning Christ's divinity, till the Holy Spirit came upon them at the day of Pentecost. And he elsewhere highly applauds "the prudence of the blessed Apostles, who in the first place taught the humanity of our Saviour to the Jews, that they might afterwards bring them to the belief of his divinity." "The blessed Peter," says Theodoret, "preaching to the Jews, measures his doctrine by the weakness of his hearers; for he says, *Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of GOD amongst you.* This he stiles "milk fit for babes in faith; but for the perfect in faith, there was need of strong meat—the sublime philosophy concerning Christ." Jerome informs us "that St. John wrote his gospel at the entreaty of the bishops of Asia, to oppose the prevailing opinion of the Ebionites, which at length compelled him to make a declaration of Christ's divine nature."

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“What none of the other evangelists have taught us,” says Theophylact, “John has thundered forth. For as they confined their narratives to what happened to Christ in the body, and speak nothing clearly or expressly of eternal generation, it was to be feared that some earthly minded souls, who had no relish for what was truly sublime, would thence imagine, that Christ had no existence from the Father before he was born of Mary, which was actually the heresy of Paul, Bishop of Samosata, and therefore the great John declares his heavenly generation.” The caution ascribed to the Apostles seems to have extended itself to their immediate companions and successors: and the most antient Christian writings are those which at least serves the purpose of orthodoxy to quote. Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, in the ninth century, remarks, “that Clement calls our Lord Jesus Christ high priest and patriarch, but gives him none of the more lofty and divine titles.”

The evidence of the fact for which such pains were taken to account, viz. that the Christian world was in general Unitarian, is far, however, from being merely indirect and inferential. Testimonies may be produced clear, explicit, and decisive. Origen expressly affirms that the whole body of Jewish believers were included under the denomination of Ebionites, which amounts to a

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virtual information, corroborated indeed by abundant collateral evidence, that the whole body of Jewish believers were Unitarian Christians; and indeed to them the doctrine of a plurality of persons in the Godhead must have appeared gross idolatry. "The multitude of believers," says this great man, speaking of the state of the Christian world in general, "are instructed only in the shadow of the *Logos*, and not in the true *Logos* of God." "There are," says the same writer, "some *τινές* who participate of the *Logos* which was from the beginning, the *Logos* which was with God, and the *Logos* which was God. But there are others who know nothing but Christ, and him crucified; the *Logos* which was made flesh. Such is the multitude *πολλοί* of those who are called Christians." Athanasius complains of the prevalency of the Unitarian principles amongst the many, *οἱ πολλοί*: and asserts that the Son of God was scarcely preached in the churches. "Things sublime and difficult," he says, "are not to be apprehended but by faith; and ignorant people must fall, if they cannot be persuaded to rest in faith and avoid curious questions." "There is," as Cyril of Jerusalem expresses himself, "an apostacy in the bosom of the Church. Men have departed from the right faith; some confounding the Son with the Father, others daring to say that Christ was created out of nothing." The
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mild and ingenious Lactantius not merely acknowledges, but in effect justifies what Cyril thus denounces. For in speaking of Christ's commission from God, he says, "Nor did he ever assert that he himself was God, because he would not have kept the faith if being sent to abolish the plurality of Gods, and to establish the worship of one God, he had set up another besides that one." Jerom tells us "that the simple believers did not understand the scriptures as became their majesty." "The majority," says Hilary, "think that as when all things are subject to Christ, Christ will be subject to God, on account of his subjection he is not God." Basil, who first attempted to introduce into the churches of Asia Minor the orthodox doxology "Glory to the Father, Son, and Spirit!" had a most vehement and furious opposition to encounter. "The zeal and obstinacy of some, as he affirms, were such, that they would rather cut out their tongues than ascribe glory to the Spirit." And he heavily complains that the leading persons of his church were attached to the doctrines of Marcellus and Sabellius, that the mystery of godliness was everywhere laughed at. "Lament with us," says he, "the only begotten is blasphemed, and there is no one to contradict it." And his cotemporary, Gregory Nazianzen, speaking of the number of
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the orthodox, declares them “to be the smallest of the tribes of Israel.” But the most striking and remarkable declaration is perhaps that of Tertullian, who positively asserts, though he at the same time deeply laments, “that the simple, the ignorant, and the unlearned, who constitute the majority of believers, not understanding that the unity of God is to be maintained only with the *œconomy*, are shocked at this *œconomy*, ‘expavescunt ad *œconomiam*,’ and insist that this number and disposition of a trinity, is a division of the unity. They charge us with being worshippers of two and even of three Gods, and maintain that they are the worshippers of one God only. We, they say, hold the *monarchy*. Even the Latins exclaim aloud for the *monarchy*, and the Greeks themselves will not understand the *œconomy*.” In fine, so late as in the reign of the Emperor Theodosius, the great Facundus, speaking of the Unitarian doctrine, avers “that the Apostles were once imperfect in the faith, believing too little concerning Christ; but they were not upon this account heretics: for they were even then invested with a divine commission. How then, he candidly argues, can those be considered as heretics who still retain those erroneous opinions? How many are there even now in the fold of the faithful, who by merely participating

ticipating in the sacred mysteries, and by a simple observance of the commandments, we see render themselves acceptable to God!"

The opposition to the final establishment of the Trinitarian system was not, however, entirely confined to the simple and illiterate. There were many intelligent and learned Christians, who, though by no means averse to the philosophy in vogue, had much juster ideas of Christian principles, and appear to have been greatly alarmed at the dangerous lengths which so many others of high reputation in the church seemed disposed to go. Of this class were Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Marcellus of Ancyra, Photinus, &c. These men, eminent in their day for knowledge and ability, conspicuous by the dignity of their station, and high in the public estimation, agreed in asserting the undivided Deity of the Father, the proper humanity of the Son, in denying the personal existence of the *Logos*, and in maintaining that the divinity of Christ was truly and numerically the same with that of the Father, which resided in the person of Christ, and illuminated his mind by a kind of divine ray, or celestial emanation. This was Christian Unitarianism, with a slight mixture of Platonic mysticism. At a later period, the celebrated Arius, sensible, as is probable, of the absurdity of the orthodox notion of the transformation of an attribute into a per-

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son, introduced what was deemed a most alarming heresy into the church, by advancing the doctrine of a created *Logos*: and by maintaining that Christ was not of the same, but only of a similar substance with the Father; or to make use of the once famous original terms of distinction, not *ομοουσιον*, but *ομοιουσιον*. In pursuing these opinions to their proper consequences, he ventured to assert, that though all power and glory were given to Christ, there had been a period of time when he did not exist: that his deity was perfectly distinct from that of the Father: and that Christ took not upon him a human soul, but that it was the deified super-angelic spirit, which became incarnate, which suffered and died upon the cross. This hypothesis, however, stood in direct opposition to the plainest evidence both of scripture and antiquity. It had never before been doubted but that the scripture uniformly represented Christ as a man; and those who affirmed him to be God as well as man had, as far back as opinions could be traced, supposed the *Logos* or divine nature to be conjoined to the inferior or human nature of Christ, in what was stiled in the orthodox, “the hypostatic union.” But by this novel and alarming hypothesis, Christ, instead of sustaining the characters of both God and man, was denied to be either truly God or truly man. And it plainly inculcated a doctrine,

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till this time unknown in the Christian world, of a supreme and a subordinate God—a doctrine irreconcilable with all just ideas of the unity of the divine nature, and which obviously subjected the religion of Christ to the heinous imputation of polytheism. This doctrine, however, which professed to be a just medium between two opposite extremes, and which was indeed far more alluring to the imagination, than the simple creed of the vulgar, and far less absurd and irrational than the mystical theology of the learned, very rapidly diffused itself, and at one period even bid fair to supersede the established system of orthodoxy. At length, however, after a long and vehement struggle, Trinitarianism gained that complete ascendancy which it has ever since preserved; and in the lapse of successive centuries the Christian world gradually became as zealously attached to this doctrine, as it was formerly offended and even shocked at it.

In the present age, however, an age distinguished by the prevalence of the spirit of rational and liberal enquiry, we see that the ancient system of Unitarianism “shakes off the dust, and rears its reverend head.” It even seems to advance with accelerated force and vigor; exhibiting the most auspicious omens of an ultimate and complete triumph over the pride of learning, and the violence of power.

ESSAY VII.

ANALYSIS OF BISHOP BUTLER'S ANALOGY.

“**T**HE analogy of religion, natural and revealed, to the constitution and course of nature,” by the celebrated Bishop Butler, is the production of a very powerful and comprehensive mind. The great and primary object of the labours of this learned prelate is not to exhibit the direct and regular proofs of religion, either natural or revealed, but to discuss what may be styled the previous question; or, in other words, to display not the positive certainty, but the abstract credibility of the great truths which religion teaches. For if religion be supposed to inculcate doctrines which are in themselves either grossly absurd or highly improbable, the positive evidence in favor of them will make little impression, in comparison of what it must necessarily do, if the mind were previously prepared for the reception of those tenets, by a clear discernment of their general consistency and agreement with the constitution and course of nature, or of the correspondence of these abstract and
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speculative principles with the phænomena actually presented to our view.

Pre-supposing, therefore, as the foundation of this analogical reasoning, the existence of a supreme intelligent cause, the creator, governor, and preserver of the universe, he attempts, with much ability and sagacity, though in a stile uncommonly obscure and intricate, to shew that the fundamental doctrines of natural and revealed religion are such as might reasonably be expected to result from the divine wisdom and benevolence, as those attributes are actually displayed in the works of creation and providence, and are encumbered with no other difficulties than such as are perfectly analogous to those with which the system of nature, subsisting independent of all speculation, is itself attended. And it is credible, therefore, and even, in a certain degree, probable, that both systems may proceed from the same Divine Author.

The doctrine of a future state comes, Chap. I. under the Bishop's consideration as a principle of primary and essential importance in religion. And the natural credibility of this doctrine will, as he observes, strike us very forcibly, if we advert to that general law of nature, which has, in fact, destined all percipient, and, more particularly, all intelligent beings, to pass through various states of progressive existence. Whatever

improvements in knowledge and happiness we are led to expect, it can scarcely be imagined that the change from the present mode of existence to that future life which religion presents to our view, will exceed, in magnitude and importance, the changes we have actually experienced since the commencement of our existence. If an embryo in the womb, or an infant in the cradle, is, by the operation of a mysterious law of nature, transformed into a LOCKE, a BACON, or a NEWTON, why should it be deemed a thing impossible that the same law should continue to operate, that farther changes may yet take place, and that higher degrees of improvement are still attainable in, perhaps, ceaseless and infinite progression? In the lower orders of creation the same analogy is discernible. The eagle, the peacock, and the ostrich: by what miracle of nature were they enabled to burst the shell in which they were once confined, and to enter, by a sudden transition, into a new sphere of action and enjoyment? Who could imagine that the motionless and torpid aurelia would be soon metamorphosed into a gaudy and painted butterfly? Or, to descend to the vegetable and inanimate creation, who can reflect, without astonishment and admiration, that a seed thrown, perhaps, carelessly into the earth, and apparently decaying and rotting there, should revive in the form of a rose, a lily,

lily, or a carnation; that a date should shoot up into a beautiful and flourishing palm-tree; and an oak, the majestic growth of ages, arise from the mean and humble acorn? With all these wonderful vicissitudes and progressive improvements of existence in contemplation, who will venture to pronounce that it is inconsistent with the general laws by which the universe is regulated, that man, for whom all other things were made, should himself be destined to rise again, when the heavens are no more, to a state of felicity and glory, far superior to the highest attainments of the present life? Though it is not pretended that this mode of reasoning is sufficiently conclusive to serve as a solid basis of rational belief, yet it certainly affords such presumptions as make it highly irrational to refuse attention to the proofs of this doctrine on pretext of its previous incredibility. Here it would have been discreet in the learned prelate to have rested satisfied; for here the argument from analogy as to this point appears to cease. On the contrary, he has with great labour and ingenuity attempted, it is to be feared in vain, to prove that the argument extends much farther. And the consideration upon which he lays the superior stress is this; “that there exists a general presumption of the continuance of all things in the state in which they are, except we have some specific ground to

believe that an alteration will take place. Thus we expect, with the firmest confidence, that the sun will emit the same heat and light to-morrow that he does to-day; that the sea will continue to ebb and flow with the same regularity, and that the earth, by revolving round its axis, will not cease to produce the vicissitudes of day and night. If, then, argues this philosophical prelate, there is no positive ground or reason to believe that the dissolution of the body implies the extinction of the percipient principle, we are authorized to conclude, from the strongest analogy, that this principle, i. e. properly speaking, the man, or the living intelligent agent, continues to exist, notwithstanding the dissolution of the organized material system."

According to this hypothetical statement, the bishop's reasoning is indeed conclusive; but, unfortunately, in order to establish the force, or even the reality of the analogy, it is necessary previously to demonstrate that we have no positive or specific ground to apprehend that the dissolution of the body implies the cessation of perception. It is evident, therefore, that this pretended argument from analogy resolves itself into a mere metaphysical disquisition. For, if the metaphysical argument, which is brought to prove the independency of perception upon material organization, is allowed to be just, there
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can be no difference of opinion as to the analogical argument which is founded upon it. But, admitting that perception is not, and cannot be the necessary result of any organical system, yet as it is an unquestionable fact that perception, so far as our knowledge and experience extend, exists not but in conjunction with such organization, the conclusion seems obvious, according to the rules of analogy, that it is incapable, as far as we can judge of the constitution of nature, of any separate existence. To allege that the hypothesis of the separate existence of the percipient principle involves in it no contradiction or absurdity, is futile and frivolous. For a mere possibility, unsupported by evidence, is surely no ground of rational belief; but, when urged in opposition to actual phænomena, it must, doubtless, be rejected as a wild and random conjecture.

It is plain, then, that this argument from analogy is built upon a metaphysical hypothesis which is itself advanced in direct contradiction to analogy. All that can fairly be inferred from the concession that perception is the property of an immaterial substance, is this; that notwithstanding the dissolution of the material system, the immaterial substance will, agreeably to the analogy urged by the learned prelate, still continue to subsist: but that the exercise of the property

perty or power of perception will be entirely suspended during its state of separation, which as the Bishop himself observes, may be supposed, and yet the powers themselves remain undestroyed. And as we have reason farther to believe from analogy, that existence is not at first bestowed, nor in any instance continued, but to answer some purpose of utility, it is a rational conclusion, that the power of perception will ultimately be restored by a re-union at the destined period with the former, or more probably with an highly improved and more exquisite system of organization.

The bishop proceeds in the following Chapters II. III. to prove that the moral government of God, and the final state of retribution, are doctrines of religion highly credible in themselves, on the ground of their perfect consonancy to the actual course of nature, and the dispensations of providence in the present life. Indeed the analogy is here so striking and forcible, that few persons who admit the reality of a future state pretend to doubt that it will be a state of moral retribution. Nay, it may be justly affirmed, that the moral argument in favour of a future state, deduced from the evident traces of a moral government already established, and clearly discernible in the common course of nature and constitution of things, is more satisfactory than any
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metaphysical argument which the most subtle reasonings, and the most acute investigation of the properties of matter and spirit have ever been able to supply. If then the positive declarations of religion, respecting the reality of a future state of existence, are corroborated by the phænomena of nature, much more the information which it affords concerning the purposes of divine Providence in this destination of man. Who can hesitate to believe that the moral government and discipline which has already commenced on earth, will be carried on in that unseen world to which we are hastening, and at length receive its final and complete accomplishment?

The objections which may be advanced against the general credibility of this system admit of such easy and decisive answers from analogy, that in fact, little stress has been placed upon them by sceptics themselves, and they do not merit so elaborate a confutation as they have received from this zealous and learned prelate. It cannot be denied that we now live under a moral government, however imperfect it may be deemed, as terminating in the present life; that we are so constituted, as clearly to discern the superior excellence and dignity of virtue, and the obligation of regulating our conduct in conformity to its dictates. We cannot avoid perceiving, that the general tendencies of virtue are favourable to happiness;

happinefs; and that vice is not only hateful in its own nature, but in the ufual and eftablifhed courfe of things, leads to mifery and ruin. Who then will dare to affert that religion teaches an incredible doctrine, when fhe declares that to punifh thofe violations of the divine law which efcape with impunity on earth, and to reward thofe afts of exalted virtue which are here attended with immediate lofs and fuffering, are the grand purpofes which a future ftate of retribution is intended to answer. But, fays the vain and prefumptuous objector, “ Can it be imagined that God will for any offences committed againft him, if fuch can be fupposed, avenge himfelf upon fo feeble an adverfary? Will he concern himfelf with the mean affairs of mortals? Will he ftoop from his lofty throne to punifh, with unrelenting feverity, a being fo weak and frail as man, fo liable to error, fo much the flave of prejudice and paffion, fo naturally prone to that which is evil and averfe to that which is good? If, as religion teaches, God is poffeffed of the attribute of infinite benevolence, the characteristics of his government muft be indulgence and lenity. From his goodnefs we have every thing to hope; from his repentment we can have nothing to fear.” Are thefe your views? Examine then the order of the univerfe, and the actual constitution and courfe of nature; and fee if you can find any folid
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ground to build these hopes and expectations upon. Admit or reject the speculative doctrine of the perfection of the divine attributes as you please, it cannot be denied that vice, or moral depravity, is actually accompanied with the most alarming and unequivocal tokens of the divine displeasure and indignation. We may indeed pretend, that the divine goodness requires that man should be placed in a situation less unfavourable to the attainment of that happiness which is the great end of existence. But not to enter into an abstruse enquiry into the nature of the divine attributes, or into the mode or extent of their operation, it is a fact that the happiness of man is made in a very great degree to depend upon his own efforts: and that if we neglect or reject those means of virtuous exertion or activity which providence has plainly designed to be subservient to the attainment of this end, we are as it were abandoned by providence, and left to suffer the dire effects of a vicious and profligate course of life; infamy, remorse, pain, disease, and oftentimes a premature and untimely dissolution. On the contrary, virtue is for the most part, for it is of the general constitution and course of things only that we are now speaking, attended with conscious satisfaction, with esteem and respect from the world, with peace and serenity of mind, with a chearful and rational enjoyment of life, and
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with a pleasing and animating hope in the hour of death. It is manifest then, from an impartial survey of the actual phænomena of human life, that the difference arising from moral depravity and moral rectitude, which subsists in the characters of men, is no trivial consideration in the view of the righteous Governor of the universe; that virtue has the stamp and seal of the divine approbation; and, exclusive of all abstract or refined speculations, we may be assured from our own experience of the divine dispensations, that admitting the reality of a future state of existence, the same general system of moral government will not only be extended to that state, but will probably receive its final and complete accomplishment in it.

Religion also represents the present life as a state of trial, probation, and discipline; a state in which we are exposed to constant temptation from various causes; and which requires our utmost vigilance, caution, resolution, and perseverance, in order to avoid any deviation from the strict line of duty. In this respect also the Bishop has taken much pains, Chap. IV. V. to show that the analogy holds good. The present life is, relatively to our temporal as well as religious interests, a state of trial and temptation. Our success and prosperity here, as well as our happiness hereafter, greatly depend upon our voluntary efforts and exertions.

exertions. “ Mankind having,” to use the words of this philosophical theologian, “ a temporal interest depending upon themselves, and a prudent course of behaviour being necessary to secure it, passions inordinately excited, whether by means of example, or by any other external circumstance, towards such objects, at such times or in such degrees as that they cannot be gratified consistently with worldly prudence, are temptations dangerous and too often successful temptations to forego a greater temporal good for a less; i. e. to forego what is, upon the whole, our temporal interest for the sake of a present gratification. This is a description of our state of trial in our temporal capacity. Substitute now the word future for temporal, and virtue for prudence, and it will be just as proper a description of our state of trial in our religious capacity: so analogous are they to each other.

We are an inferior part of the creation of God; and we certainly are in a condition which does not seem, by any means, the most advantageous we could imagine or desire, either in our natural or moral capacity, for securing either our present or our future interest. However, this condition, low and careful, and uncertain as it is, does not afford any just ground of complaint. For as men may manage their temporal affairs with prudence, and so pass their days here on

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earth in tolerable ease and satisfaction, by a moderate degree of care—so, likewise, with regard to religion, there is no more required than what they are well able to do, and what they must be greatly wanting to themselves if they neglect. Did not experience teach us juster notions of things, it might speciously be urged, that it is improbable we should be involved in any such circumstances of hazard or danger, as might terminate in error and in misery. This is indeed a great speculative difficulty; but still the constitution of nature is what it is. Our happiness and misery are trusted to ourselves, and made to depend upon our own conduct. And as it cannot be pretended that our present interest is secured to us without any solicitude on our part, why should it be imagined that our future interest, if we have any such, should require none of our regard or attention? And there is a striking and obvious analogy between that painful and laborious course of education which is necessary to qualify us for the higher stations of honour and usefulness in life, and that moral discipline, rigid and severe as it may be deemed, which is requisite, in order to form a character capable of the refined and elevated enjoyments of a future state, and which the present world is peculiarly adapted to furnish. For the prevalence of vice is the very circumstance which both proves and increases

creases the energy of the virtuous principle, and which renders the present world a proper school of moral discipline and improvement in virtue. Still dares the angry and discontented speculatist to ask, "Why were not all the trouble and danger unavoidably accompanying this state of discipline wholly saved us, by our being made at once the creatures and the characters which we were to be?" Nay, but who art thou, O man! that repliest against God? Religion pretends not to solve, or even deigns to notice these difficulties. Without any regard to the doubts of speculatists, or the doubtful solution of those doubts, she declares in the most express and authoritative language, "that we must give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, lest a promise being made us of entering into everlasting rest, any of us should eventually fall short of it." And philosophy confirms and corroborates this declaration, by demonstrating that the established constitution of nature is not designed or calculated to save us from trouble and danger, but to make us capable of surmounting them by the most arduous and resolute exertions.

In the course of his reasonings, the Bishop, who was a warm and zealous advocate for the hypothesis of philosophical liberty, in opposition to the system of necessity, but who was much more anxious to advance the general interests of

religion and virtue, than to establish the reputation of any hypothesis, thinks it incumbent upon him, by arguments proper to the Necessarians, to show that the system of necessity, if supposed to be true, is by no means at variance with religion; but on the contrary, that the analogy of nature clearly proves the absurdity as well as impiety of all attempts to subvert the foundations of religion, and to annihilate the sanctions and obligations of morality, under the specious but vain pretext, that freedom of agency is indispensably requisite in order to render man the proper subject of moral government. In the first place, the Bishop asserts, in common with his metaphysical opponents, that upon the scheme, or system of necessity, man does not cease to be an agent; and that when a Necessarian speaks of all events taking place by necessity, he must mean by the operation of an agent acting necessarily. "This," says his Lordship, "he *must* mean, for I am sensible he would not chuse to mean it." But an appeal to the writings of his most celebrated opponents will demonstrate a great deficiency of candor in this affirmation; the advocates of necessity, universally admitting that man is an intelligent and voluntary agent; and it is not they, but the Libertarians, who declare the term necessary agent to be absurd and contradictory. The dispute is plainly verbal.

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If, in defining the term agency, the idea of metaphysical liberty be included, necessity will of course be excluded; but this amounts to a mere *petitio principii*. It is a matter of fact and experience, absolutely incontrovertible, that man is capable of performing certain actions; that he has the power of adopting certain means in order to accomplish certain ends. He is, therefore, doubtless a voluntary and intelligent agent. But whether he is a necessary or a free agent, depends upon his ability or inability to deviate from a certain precise line of action; or, in other words, to form different or opposite determinations, all previous circumstances remaining the same. If he cannot, he is a necessary agent; because his actions are definite and certain. If he can, he is a free agent, in a strict metaphysical sense, because his actions are contingent and uncertain. But if different actions or determinations are in a case of this nature possible, it is manifest that an effect will take place without a cause. For the statement of the question itself supposes, that all the previous circumstances, and consequently all the efficient causes, remain precisely and invariably the same. And thus, a metaphysical, or *lawless* freedom of agency, stands in direct contradiction to that grand axiom and foundation of all philosophy, that the same causes in the same circumstances will produce precisely the same effects.

Allowing man, therefore, according to the system of necessity, to be a voluntary and intelligent, though not in the strict philosophical sense a free agent, the bishop proceeds to show, in a very able and satisfactory manner, that he is, nevertheless, a very proper subject of God's moral government. For *this* necessity, as he observes, does not exclude deliberation, choice, preference, and acting from certain principles and to certain ends. It is evident, therefore, that it is perfectly reconcileable with the characteristics of benevolence, veracity, justice, &c. which are the very foundations of religion. And, since we find that this necessity no more hinders men from being benevolent than cruel, true than faithless, just than unjust, it cannot be thought unreasonable or unworthy of the divine wisdom and goodness, to exhibit to our view motives which may incite us to the love and practice of virtue, in the manner most consonant to the frame and constitution of our nature: and that those motives should be sustained and invigorated by the established sanctions of rewards and punishments. For, if the grand end of the moral government of God be the progressive improvement of his intelligent offspring in moral excellence, what mode of discipline can be imagined more wisely or happily adapted to the accomplishment of the divine purpose? In fine, speculate as we please upon the
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nature of causation and the origin of action, effects will remain precisely the same. We are, in fact, treated as moral and accountable agents; and, when we cease to consider and to conduct ourselves as such, we actually suffer; and, if there subsists any analogy between the present and the future dispensations of providence, we shall, no doubt, continue to suffer the injurious consequences naturally resulting from our own misconduct. That so large a proportion of mankind should fall short of that happiness which is destined for the virtuous, is, indeed, a subject of astonishment and deep regret. But the difficulty is the same on each hypothesis. For of what use or value is the gift of liberty, when it is previously known that it will terminate in ruin? From the opposite system arises, indeed, a bright ray of hope and consolation, when we reflect that punishment, as applied by a being of perfect wisdom and goodness to necessary agents, can differ nothing from chastisement; that it is really and ultimately, not of a judicial but of a corrective nature. And we may infer, upon grounds of the highest probability, therefore, that when the great and beneficent purposes of the divine providence are accomplished, a new and glorious scene of things shall succeed, in which the divine attributes shall be displayed in their full lustre and harmony; permanent happiness shall arise

from transient misery, and “mercy first and last the brightest shine.”

Finally; If it should be objected that though the credibility of religion, considered as a question of fact, is strongly confirmed by analogy, yet that the justice and goodness of the moral government of God receive no additional illustration from this mode of reasoning, the answer is obvious; that though analogy does not offer any direct evidence of this nature, yet, supposing the actual existence of such evidence independent of analogy, it is of singular use in proving that any apparent exceptions to the rectitude of the general system are by no means sufficient to destroy, or even sensibly to impair the force of that evidence. For we know that in the established course and constitution of nature, which exhibits the most striking marks of divine wisdom and intelligence, difficulties and perplexities of the very same kind occur. In a word, though we clearly discern the characteristics of wisdom and goodness in the general system, yet we are utterly unable, either in the natural or moral world, satisfactorily and distinctly to answer the cavils which may easily be raised against the perfection, or even the existence of those attributes, by perverse and malignant objectors. Both parts of the system must be acknowledged in a great degree incomprehensible by us. And can we think
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it strange that we are not in all cases competent judges by what mode of acting the great ends of the divine government will be most effectually accomplished? Of the existence of the natural and moral attributes of GOD, if we have the most obvious and striking proofs, when we are called upon to account for the apparent occasional deviations from the general plan of wisdom and goodness, it is surely allowable to plead our ignorance and inability to comprehend all the parts of the entire system; nor can such partial ignorance in the smallest degree tend to invalidate, as the experience of every day evinces, the clear proof arising from general wisdom and rectitude of action and conduct.

The learned prelate commences the SECOND PART of this elaborate and excellent work; which treats of *Revealed Religion*, with some general observations on the importance of Christianity, as a proper introduction to his main design, which is to demonstrate its credibility. And, in order to exhibit more clearly and forcibly the importance of the Christian revelation, the Bishop chuses to consider it, 1st, as a republication of the religion of nature; and, 2dly, as a dispensation of things not discoverable by reason. It seems, however, not easy to comprehend in what

sense, or with what propriety Christianity can be considered as a republication of the religion of nature, if religion be regarded in its most interesting point of view, as the great bond of connection between the visible and the invisible world. For of what does the religion of nature consist, but of dark and gloomy doubts, of faint and feeble conjectures? She offers no evidence but such as is founded on refined and abstruse speculations, far above the level of common capacities; such as is not calculated, therefore, to make any serious impression on the heart, or which could ever produce any general or permanent reformation in the life or conduct. But life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel. There we see the great doctrines of religion taught with perspicuity and energy; thus laying a foundation for that melioration and progressive improvement in human affairs, which Christianity makes it our happiness to expect, and our duty to accelerate and advance. "Christianity is a republication of the religion of nature," say its zealous, but injudicious friends.— "Christianity is as old as the Creation," reply its artful and insidious enemies. As long, therefore, as the generality of mankind profess to adhere to the religion of nature, if they are not Christians, they think themselves, doubtless, as good as Christians, and they can have no motive

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or inducement to concern themselves farther in the investigation of the subject. “*Invenis multos,*” says St. Augustine, “*propterea nolle fieri Christianos, quia quasi sufficiunt sibi de bona vita sua. Bene vivere, opus est, ait. Quid mihi præcepturus est Christus, ut bene vivam? Jam bene vivo. Quid mihi necessarius est Christus? Nullum homicidium, nullum furtum, nullam rapinam facio; res alienas non concupisco, nullo adulterio contaminor. Nam inveniatur in vita mea aliquid quod reprehendatur, et qui reprehenderit, faciat Christianum.*”

The Bishop farther considers the Christian revelation as a dispensation of things not discoverable by reason. But divers of the doctrines enumerated by the Bishop, as the things included in this dispensation, many will acknowledge themselves as unable to discover by the light of revelation as of reason. The importance of Christianity happily does not depend upon the belief, or even the existence of any such doctrines: and we may safely proceed to investigate the arguments urged by the Bishop in support of its credibility. And an accurate survey of those arguments will convince us, that the fortress of Christianity, built on the rock of ages, is impregnable to human assault; although the lofty walls and bulwarks added, by the foolishness of man’s wisdom, to the original fabric, not resting
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upon the same foundation, “ nod from on high, and totter to their fall.”

In the succeeding pages, Chap. II. the Bishop endeavours, in the first place, to obviate the supposed presumption against a revelation considered as miraculous; and some abstract considerations are adduced, to prove that there exists no real previous presumption against miracles.—But the most subtle arguments will never be able to convince mankind of this. There exists, doubtless, a previous presumption, not only against miracles, but against all extraordinary and uncommon phænomena; and not only against all extraordinary phænomena, but even against the most common occurrences of life, which perpetually fall out contrary to previous expectation and probability, as the slightest reflection must satisfy us. But then, the same reflection will suffice to shew, that such antecedent improbability must, and, in fact, that it does, easily yield to the force of positive testimony. The question properly stated, then, as the Bishop himself observes, is, “ What *peculiar* presumption is there against miracles?” And, it is manifest, there are many facts not properly miraculous, yet so extraordinary, and previously so incredible, that any additional presumption against miracles, if it exist, cannot be estimated by the understanding or imagination. These facts, notwithstanding,

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ing, are universally received on the credit of human testimony. And whatever may be the antecedent improbability of any fact, natural or supernatural, when it is actually given in evidence, it *must* be admitted as true, unless the attestor is supposed to be himself deceived, or the intentional deceiver of others. And the peculiar presumption against miracles actually attested, consists solely in this, that men, through a natural love of the marvellous, are easily duped by relations of this nature; and, through an ambition of fame, authority, and pre-eminence, they are, perhaps, still more easily tempted to impose upon the weakness and credulity of others. We are therefore, doubtless, entitled to demand very strong and decisive evidence both of the sagacity and integrity of the attestors, before we acknowledge the validity of the attestation. But when once it is satisfactorily proved, that they could not, in the nature of things, either be deceived themselves or the intentional deceivers of others, the demonstration is complete; and to reject the miracle, on pretence of its previous incredibility, is the strangest of paradoxes, or rather the grossest of absurdities.

The object of the third and fourth Chapters is, to prove, from the analogy of revelation to natural religion, and the established constitution of the universe, that it may reasonably be expected

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to contain some things for which it is difficult, or rather impossible, to account. Many of its parts may not approve themselves to our finite and limited understandings. To some, perhaps, the system will appear deficient, to others redundant. To the wise it will be a stumbling-block, and to the learned foolishness. But to set up human reason as the standard by which the doctrines of a divine revelation are to be tried, supposing the authenticity of the revelation to be sufficiently ascertained by previous or independent evidence, is, surely, the height of presumption and folly. Nothing can invalidate the force of such evidence, but the clearest conviction of internal absurdity or immorality in the revelation itself: and, in this case, the internal and external evidence being at irreconcilable variance with each other, we should, indeed, be reduced to a state of insuperable embarrassment and perplexity. But nothing of this kind can be pretended, with respect to the Christian revelation. The general tendency of it is such as reason teaches us to expect, and the sublimest morality approves. And the difficulties with which it is attended are no other than might previously be expected to result from the imperfection of our faculties, and the narrow extent of the sphere of human comprehension; and are perfectly analogous to the difficulties which we constantly experience from
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the contemplation of the natural and moral phenomena of the universe. Objections against the general system of revelation, therefore, founded upon this basis, are, evidently, fallacious and frivolous. The evidence of revelation ought, indeed, to be scrutinized with the most rigid severity. But when we once discern solid and sufficient grounds to believe the revelation to be genuine and authentic, we have nothing farther to do but to receive, with faith and humility, the doctrines which it inculcates, making the best use of our reason and understanding, un-
 awed by human authority, in order to ascertain the true sense and moral purposes of those doctrines. For that a divine revelation can inculcate doctrines either absurd or pernicious, we may surely be allowed to discard as a monstrous supposition. The Bishop concludes his admirable reasonings on this subject with a very striking and sagacious remark, “ that though we are very inadequate judges in what particular mode infinite power will be determined, by infinite wisdom and goodness, to act in any definite situation, yet we are competent judges in what manner human folly, enthusiasm, or worldly policy, will tempt men to act in particular circumstances ; and if the Christian revelation bears none of these characteristics, but if, on the contrary, it is diametrically opposite, in its whole spirit and
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tendency, to the views and conduct either of enthusiasts or impostors, it affords a very strong, nay an irresistible presumptive argument, that it could never originate with men of this description, or could be rationally supposed to be derived from them.

“ And as Christianity is properly a part of the general plan of Providence, and conducive to its completion, if, in any respects, the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the Christian revelation are not fully apparent, our utter inability to comprehend, ‘ how parts relate to parts, or they to whole,’ in the endless concatenation of causes and effects, must as effectually preclude any objection to the rectitude of this particular dispensation, as of the universal system of which it constitutes a part.”

The Bishop proceeds, Chap. V. and VI. to treat of particular objections to the Christian system; and, first, he combats the opinion, that the doctrine of a mediator between God and man is contrary to reason and credibility. And though it is by no means necessary to adjudge, precisely, the ideas of the learned prelate respecting the mediatorial office of Christ, which he seems to represent as of a nature highly mystical and awfully obscure, yet he has very ably shewn, that it is perfectly agreeable to the analogy of nature, that God should act by the instrumentality

tality or mediation of others. "We find, by experience," says he, "that God does appoint mediators to be the instruments of good and evil to us; the instruments of his justice and his mercy. And the objection militates not against mediation in that high, eminent, and peculiar sense in which Christ is represented as our mediator, but against the very idea and notion of a mediator as such, and abstractedly considered. Men may themselves do much towards preventing the ill consequences of their own misconduct; but much more may be done by the assistance of their fellow-creatures; which assistance nature requires, and prompts us to. This is the general constitution of the world; and this may properly be considered as the effect of mercy or compassion in the original constitution of things, as distinguished from goodness in general. And the whole known constitution and course of things affording us instances of such compassion, it would be according to the analogy of nature to hope, that, however ruinous the natural consequences of vice might be, from the general laws of God's government over the universe, yet provision might be made, possibly might have been originally made, for preventing these ruinous consequences from inevitably following, at least from following universally, and in all cases. Thus we are taught that Christ loved us, and
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gave himself for us, the just for the unjust, with a love which he himself compares to that of human friendship, though all comparisons must here prove wholly inadequate. And, in consequence of this interposition, the punishment was averted, which, according to the general laws of God's moral government, must have been the natural consequence of that sin or moral depravity, from the power and dominion of which we have redemption through his mediation or instrumentality, as conspicuously displayed in the whole course of his life, sufferings, miracles, death, and resurrection from the grave. Those who object to this constitution of things, as unwise or unjust, do not consider that vicarious punishment, or the sufferings of the innocent for the guilty, is a providential appointment of every day's experience, and that it is, in reality, not so much an objection against Christianity as against the general constitution of nature. And it evidently amounts to no more than this, that a divine appointment cannot be necessary or expedient, because the objector does not discern it to be so, though he must own the nature of the case is such, as to render him incapable of judging whether it be so or not; or of seeing it to be necessary though it were so. The presumption of this species of objections seems almost lost in the folly of them, especially when they
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are urged against parts of the Christian system, perfectly analogous to those natural dispensations of providence which are the subjects, not of abstract speculation, but of actual experience."

"Objections against revelation from its want of universality, and the supposed deficiency in its proof, have also frequently been insisted upon as of great weight. If this religion were true, say the adversaries of Christianity, all mankind would be equally favoured with the advantages of it; and it would be attended not with dark and doubtful, but clear and demonstrative evidence." The extreme futility of these objections, as the Bishop remarks, may be shewn by observing the suppositions on which they are founded, which are really such as these—that God can bestow no grace or favor, unless in the degree which We imagine most for our advantage; nor an advantage upon any, unless he bestowed the same upon All.—Suppositions absolutely contradicted, not by any rare or remarkable exceptions to the usual course of God's natural government of the world, but by the general and uniform analogy of nature. The Author of Nature, in numberless instances, bestows that upon some which he does not upon others, who seem equally to stand in need of it. In fact, his gifts are conferred with the most promiscuous variety among creatures of the same

species. Health and strength, intellectual capacity, means of improvement in knowledge, power, riches, and all external advantages. Suppose then the evidence which some have of religion to amount to little more than a perception of the possibility of its truth; others to attain to a full conviction of its importance and reality, with a distinct apprehension of the grounds on which that conviction is founded: and a still more numerous class, to possess the intermediate degrees of evidence and conviction which occupy the interval between these two remote extremes. All this would be perfectly consistent with the conduct of Providence in the distribution of its other blessings. There would be nothing in these varieties and comparative disadvantages, but may be paralleled by manifest analogies in the natural dispensations of Providence as they respect our temporal capacity. Is it not a matter of doubt and uncertainty wherein our temporal interest really consists? What are the most probable means of attaining it? And whether those means will be eventually successful? That religion, either natural or revealed, is not intuitively true is confessed: but this is surely no sufficient reason why we should dismiss all solicitude about it, or refuse to consider with impartiality and attention the evidence, whatever it may be; with which it is accompanied.

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There is no fairer scope for the exercise of ingenuoufness, candor and integrity, than in the investigation of a question of this nature. And if after all the minds of any should remain in suspense, a serious apprehension that it may be true as certainly creates obligations of a moral kind as a full conviction that it is true. And if in what regards our temporal concerns, we think it incumbent upon us to regulate our conduct according to the rules of prudence, and the greatest probability of advantage; how comes it to pass that in religion alone men think themselves discharged from all obligation, and at liberty to act as if it were wholly destitute of proof, because that proof does not perhaps rise to absolute demonstration or irrefragable certainty? In treating upon this topic, GROTIUS hesitates not to say, that the proof of Christianity was not so decisive as it might have been, "*Ut ita sermo Evangelii tanquam lapis esset Lydius, ad quem ingenia sanabilia explorarentur.*"

In order, however, more effectually to obviate this objection, the Bishop proceeds, Chap. VII. to unfold, in a very masterly manner, the nature of the positive evidence adduced in support of Christianity, and to shew that it is in fact so clear and full, and stands upon a foundation so firm, that in the common concerns of life, and in relation to our temporal interests, it would be

deemed the height of extravagance and folly to refuse, or even to hesitate to act upon it. And either there is no just ground from which to reason in analogy, or it is certain that the extravagance of refusing or of hesitating to regulate our conduct, as far as our spiritual or future interests are concerned, in conformity to this evidence, must be deemed a species of folly incomparably more dangerous and fatal.

The two direct and fundamental proofs of Christianity are miracles and prophecies. But there are, as the Bishop observes, many collateral considerations which, though they cannot be classed under either of these denominations, add greatly to the general effect of the evidence. And though separately considered they amount only to presumptions, when viewed collectively, they form an argument of the utmost cogency and importance. It is an acknowledged historical fact that Christianity was originally founded on the evidence of miracles, i. e. upon the allegation or pretence of miracles publicly and recently wrought; and that the earliest professors of Christianity were so firmly convinced of the reality of these miracles, that they were willing, nay eager to lay down their lives in testimony of their attachment to the religion founded upon this miraculous evidence. It cannot be denied that education, and prejudice, and authority, were

were united in opposition to Christianity at its first appearance. It remains then for those, who controvert the reality of the miracles, to frame some plausible hypothesis which has never yet been attempted, in order to shew how men, not absolutely devoid of reason and understanding, could be so grossly deceived by these pretences, as to abandon their temporal interests, and all that mankind in general hold dear, to embrace a religion which offered no compensation or prospect of advantage on this side the grave. A philosophical unbeliever is surely under an obligation to resolve in some mode or other this great difficulty. The religion founded on the belief of these facts still exists; and the same belief still obtains amongst the most learned and enlightened nations. Whence then did it originate? Is it sufficient insolently or carelessly to reply, that perhaps it originated in enthusiasm or perhaps in folly? Enthusiasm doubtless will induce men not only to embrace the most absurd speculative opinions, but to make the greatest sacrifices for the sake of those opinions. But it cannot be pretended that enthusiasm will account for a man's believing, that he and thousands more were eye and ear witnesses of a series of facts which never happened—for this is not enthusiasm, but insanity. Shall we then ascribe this belief to the influence, not of enthusiasm,

but of imbecillity and folly? But this solution involves in it the same egregious absurdity. The folly of mankind is, indeed, great and manifest. But to believe, upon the report of a few individuals, if men extravagant enough to invent so senseless a story could be found, that a succession of miracles was, really and recently, wrought in the view of the whole world, but of which the world was entirely ignorant, would be an extraordinary species of credulity indeed.—It would not be folly but idiotism.

As to the evidence of Christianity from prophecy, whatever may be alleged with respect to the darkness, and doubts, and the difficulties with which it is embarrassed, it cannot be denied, that various remarkable coincidences exist between certain real or pretended predictions, and certain subsequent historical events. If, then, it is affirmed, that these coincidences are merely and wholly fortuitous, it is reasonable to expect, that some instances of random conjecture, equally fortunate, and of a similar or parallel nature, might be pointed out, in order to give weight and credibility to the assertion. Something equivalent to the prophecies, for instance, relating to the dispersion of the Jews, the advent of the Messiah, or the grand apostacy of the Christian church. But if nothing analogous to these can be produced, we are, surely, warranted

ranted to conclude, that the correspondence subsisting between the predictions and the subsequent events, implies a sagacity and foresight more than human. And the difficulties attending the interpretation of particular prophecies, however great, will not at all invalidate the general proof of a divine interposition, arising from those more explicit declarations, with respect of which we are able clearly to discern the conformity of the event to the prediction. For if we suppose a writing, some parts of which were in cypher imperfectly understood, and other parts in words at length, would it not be intolerable absurdity to maintain, that the plain truths contained in the intelligible parts conveyed no information, unless we could, to universal satisfaction, completely decypher the whole? But in stating the general evidence in favor of Christianity, the indirect and circumstantial presumptions of its truth must, by no means, be omitted; or those internal characteristics of veracity and authenticity which cannot but occur to a philosophical and reflecting mind, when engaged in the contemplation of it.

The Apostolic Epistles are, for the most part, addressed not to particular individuals, but to churches or communities of Christians. In these Epistles the leading facts connected with this religion are not, indeed, expressly taught, but con-

fidently appealed to as matters of public notoriety. What purpose of imposture could this mode of writing possibly answer? When St. Paul speaks of the miraculous gifts actually subsisting in the church of Corinth, and lays down rules for the seasonable and proper exercise of them, would he not have exposed himself to contempt and ridicule, had it not been previously known, that such powers were common in the church at that period? It has been sagaciously observed, that it is not easy for men who have occasion to speak and write much concerning themselves, to avoid giving an attentive observer an insight into their real character, whether they intend it or not. But the characters of the Apostles and Evangelists, when tried by this test, will abide the severest scrutiny. The perusal of their writings leaves upon the mind an involuntary and indelible impression of simplicity, probity, and goodness. To analyze this impression, to develope, with accuracy, the causes of this universal concurrence of sentiment, would, indeed, require the skill of a philosopher; but to be sensible of its effect, only the feelings of a man. Above all, it must be allowed, that the character of CHRIST, as delineated by the artless and unaffected pencil of the sacred historians, infinitely surpasses any other that can be set in competition with it. To imagine

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gine or invent a character so far above the common standard of humanity, yet participating of all the sinless infirmities of humanity, would itself be an uncommon effort of genius. But it is evident they drew from an original. Their task was easy. Of this "Great Sublime" the actions and the discourses constitute and complete the portrait. Nor does any trace of panegyric, any the most distant expression of applause or commendation, find a place in their succinct and simple narratives.

It must also strike us very forcibly, that the earliest and ablest opposers of Christianity, whose names have descended to us, Celsus, Porphyry, Julian, &c. do not pretend to treat as fabulous the accounts of the miracles of Christ. This proves that they were admitted as genuine by the writers who preceded them. For if they had not been compelled, by the universal concurrence of testimony, to have made this concession, no doubt, they would, very readily and eagerly, have rejected them as supposititious. They pretend, indeed, that these miracles were performed by the aid of magic; a subterfuge to which modern infidels are justly ashamed to have recourse. And, therefore, they daringly deny what they have searched in vain for the means to confute.

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Also, it must be acknowledged, that however different the present system of things may be, from what philosophical speculists would previously have expected, Christianity, considered as a part of the mighty whole, is admirably adapted to the other constituent parts of the system. It is attended with that kind and degree of evidence which is suited to the nature and faculties of man, when duly cultivated and exerted. It inculcates such principles as have a direct and evident tendency to advance the happiness, and to exalt the dignity of our nature ; and it is perfectly analogous to the general course of God's moral government, so far as it can be discerned from the most attentive survey of the actual existing phenomena.

There is likewise a consideration which ought, surely, to have peculiar weight with those who are not competent to enter into a learned and laborious research into the evidences of Christianity, that a great majority of those persons, who, with the necessary previous endowments, have undertaken this investigation, have been convinced of the authenticity of its claims. Now as Christianity was originally promulgated by men little qualified to impose a deception upon the world, it appears a moral impossibility, that any imposture, framed and modelled by them, should be such as the sagacity of a learned and enlight-

enlightened age would not, easily and instantly, be able to discern and detect. That some intelligent or philosophical persons continue to doubt or disbelieve, cannot impair the force of this argument, with any impartial judge, if he finds that these persons do not attempt any direct or proper confutation of the evidence of this religion; but rest entirely their denial of its truth upon such general and vague considerations as the previous incredibility of miracles; the pretended inutility and inefficacy of revelation; and the presumption against it arising from that combination of folly, fraud, and enthusiasm, which the history of all religions, as they allege, manifestly exhibits. To investigate the proofs of Christianity, therefore, were superfluous labour, when it is pre-determined to reject them as insufficient.

Finally, the Bishop replies at large to the general objection which he supposes may be made to his general mode of reasoning—"that it is in its own nature imperfect, inconclusive, and unsatisfactory; that it leaves difficulties just as it found them; that it does not even pretend to demonstrate the wisdom and rectitude of the general system, but merely to shew that all the parts of it are liable to the same or similar exceptions; that it is a preposterous attempt to build a system of faith upon a basis of uncertainty, and a poor artifice

artifice to solve difficulties in religion by referring us to difficulties in the constitution of nature." To this objection it may be replied in a few words, that this Treatise was not intended for the amusement of speculatists, or designed as the foundation of a novel or curious theory. It is in the strictest sense practical. Admitting that there exists a Supreme Governor of the universe, it is of the highest importance that we attain just ideas of the nature of the divine administration, and the course of his providence. And if upon examination we really find ourselves placed in hazardous or disadvantageous circumstances, still it is the part of wisdom to endeavour to develop the obligations incumbent upon us in these circumstances, and to trace with diligence and caution the path which leads to happiness. And if the evidence which we are compelled to form our judgments upon be in any respects doubtful or obscure, still it is better to act in conformity than in contradiction to it: and if it can be proved that the evidence of religion is similar in its nature, and equal or superior in force to that by which we are influenced in the conduct of our temporal interests, is it not deplorable folly to reject, and much more to ridicule it, under the pretence, that in a concern of such vast importance as religion we ought

ought to attend to no evidence less than demonstrative.

It has been sufficiently proved, however, that this evidence possesses a degree of certainty on which a system of faith may be rationally founded; or at least it must be allowed to possess a degree of probability on which a system of action and conduct may be rationally founded, which is indeed of far more essential importance. To prove the absolute perfection and infinity of the divine attributes is the province rather of philosophy than religion; and if we aspire to the strictness of demonstration on any subject so much beyond the reach of our capacities, we soon find ourselves lost in the grandeur and sublimity of these abstract speculations. But the obligations incumbent upon man may easily be deduced from his actual and relative situation and circumstances, and the established and unalterable constitution of things. And if he really wishes to learn what is his true interest, and what mode of conduct is most likely to ensure his present and future happiness, and to recommend him to the divine protection and favor, which is the most important and therefore the most rational of all enquiries, the result of such an investigation is obvious—"that it is his wisdom and his safety to practise the duties of morality, and to reverence the sanctions of religion."

ESSAY

ESSAY VIII.

ON THE USE OF REASON IN CONNECTION
WITH RELIGION.

THERE is an argument which has been often triumphantly urged by the Roman Catholic writers, and which is indeed so specious and imposing, so apparently just in its principle and extensive in its consequences, that it may well be regarded as the pillar and ground of their faith. “If, say they, the truth and necessity of a divine revelation be admitted, it cannot be doubted but it is equally necessary that the true sense of that revelation should by some means be ascertained. Now common sense and daily experience fully evince, that the majority of mankind are wholly incompetent to enter into any such discussions: and also that the opinions of private individuals, who may be supposed best qualified to form a right judgment, are so opposite and discordant, that there is not the most distant probability that the genuine doctrines of Christianity should ever be established on a firm and solid foundation, except there exists some common standard of religious truth, to which it may be lawful for all men to appeal in cases of doubt and difficulty,
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and to which they shall be indispensably obliged to submit. And where shall we find that standard but in the decisions of the Universal Church! which is under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit! which is founded upon a rock, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail! whose voice is the voice of God, against which it is folly, presumption, and impiety, for any particular member of that holy and mystical body to oppose his own fallible reasonings and unauthorized opinions." This is the faint outline of that grand argument upon which the Romanists always profess their readiness to rest the whole controversy between them and the Protestants: and this is the argument which the advocates for Protestantism in general practise every artifice to evade, and of which they seem to be often staggered and confounded by the force. Nor is it any just subject of wonder that this should be the case. For many successive centuries this maxim had been regarded as sacred and incontrovertible: and when the Protestants, therefore, first found themselves under the necessity of calling it in question, they avoided giving any greater shock to their own prejudices, as well as those of their antagonists, than they were by the pressure of the occasion, led or rather driven to do. And, therefore, they contented themselves with
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denying the infallibility of the church, but they still admitted that the church might justly claim authority in controversies of faith; and that what the church taught was to be received as true, unless it could be proved contrary to the tenor of scripture. But in the prosecution of the controversy, the Protestants quickly found themselves involved in new perplexities: for either every private Christian had a right to judge whether the doctrines taught by the church were agreeable to scripture, in which case the authority of the church was an empty sound without any real meaning; or if the church were allowed to judge of the conformity of its own doctrines to the declarations of scripture, then the authority of the church was plainly equivalent to the infallibility claimed by the Romanists; the only difference consisting in this, that in the one case the church never *could* err, and in the other, that it never *did* err. For a long time, however, the reverend and learned champions of Protestantism contented themselves with this ideal distinction; and it was not, perhaps, till the Bangorian controversy took place, at the beginning of the present century, that this absurd and ridiculous subterfuge was completely abandoned; and that the right of individuals to appeal from the authority of the church to the authority of the sacred scriptures

tures, was admitted in its full extent, with an explicit avowal and approbation of all its consequences.

It is well known how great a clamour that memorable controversy excited. The church did not want for able and valiant defenders of the faith; but alas! the fatal blow was given, and CHURCH-AUTHORITY, that mighty DRAGON, was at length thrown prostrate on the ground. Notwithstanding, however, that we who live in this enlightened age are able clearly to discern the fallacy of this boasted argument in behalf of church-authority, it required a force of mind and acuteness of penetration which perhaps no man ever possessed, completely and at once, to detect this dangerous and delusive sophism. Many generations passed away after the reformation had taken place, before the most intelligent persons of the Protestant communion could prevail upon themselves to acknowledge that every private Christian was under an indispensable obligation to exercise his own reason and judgment, in forming his opinions in religion: and that the authority of the church, and the decisions of fathers and councils, as such, ought not in the smallest degree to bias his determinations. These maxims, which to us appear so just and obvious, were universally reprobated, as fraught with the most mischievous consequences; as lifting up

the doors that heresy and schism might enter in. The utmost wildness and extravagance of sentiment, leading to a general state of intellectual anarchy, they imagined must be the inevitable result of such an unbounded freedom of discussion. "An universal toleration," says Bishop Stillingfleet, "is that Trojan horse which brings in our enemies without being seen, under pretence of setting our gates wide open enough to let in our friends. Those seem very little to understand mankind, who do not apprehend the dangerous consequences of a general toleration."

It requires, indeed, at present no extraordinary sagacity to see the weakness and futility of these apprehensions. Nay, it really requires great strength of mind to feel the full force of an argument which we have always been accustomed to consider as confuted: and we cannot, therefore, without difficulty, conceive the prodigious weight of the impression which it must have made on the minds of those who had, from their earliest years, been taught to regard it as sacred for its truth, and venerable for its antiquity. Yet, though human authority has been completely discarded, the province and jurisdiction of reason have never been, and probably can never be, so accurately defined as to render all farther discussion of the subject useless. Some will always be disposed to attribute more to human reason, as a judge of divine truths, than she is entitled to claim; and others
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will be inclined to depreciate and to degrade that noble faculty of the mind below its just value. But allowing a precise coincidence of opinion to be unattainable, arguments may still avail to reduce the subsisting differences within a narrower compass; and thus we may, in morals as well as as mathematics, imagine the possibility of a perpetual approach, whilst we acknowledge the impossibility of an actual contact.

And, 1st, It may without fear of contradiction be asserted, that reason is the sole judge of the evidences of a divine revelation. A revelation destitute of evidence cannot be supposed; and to appeal to authority, as a sufficient ground of evidence, is a palpable absurdity. The authority of the church, admitting the claim, must rest upon the authority of revelation. And the authority of revelation itself must rest upon the authority of its evidence. And to make the authority of the evidence rest upon the authority of the church, is manifestly to argue in a circle, and in so small and confined a circle, that the sophism must be instantly detected. Accordingly, the Papists themselves appeal to reason as a competent judge of this matter, and very celebrated treatises have been written by the divines of the Romish communion, in which the evidences of Christianity have been ably and learnedly stated. Reason then is the acknowledged judge of this question: but the danger is, lest we

should require a degree of evidence which reason has no right to exact. If the evidence rises to probability, we should act most irrationally in rejecting it, because it falls short of moral certainty. As justly might we reject moral certainty, because it falls short of mathematical demonstration. Whoever attends to the evidences of the Christian religion with impartiality and candor, must allow the probability at least of its divine origin. In this case how will reason direct a man to act? To remain in a state of perpetual scepticism is irksome and difficult; and to reject a probability is to embrace an improbability. Let those then who incline to infidelity, in consequence of the objections to which Christianity is liable, and the difficulty they find in answering those objections satisfactorily; let such men reflect upon the insuperable difficulties with which that infidelity is itself attended. Let them take the trouble to frame, not only a negative but a positive creed, and they will soon perceive how much weaker and more exposed to objection every particular and distinct scheme of infidelity is than Christianity; how much less the direct evidence in its favour, how much greater the inconsistencies and improbabilities connected with it.

But 2dly, Reason is competent to judge, not only of the evidences but the doctrines of revelation.

lation. This, it must be owned, is a proposition to which an unqualified assent ought not to be given. Reason and revelation, notwithstanding the real and absolute harmony subsisting between them in the abstract nature of things, may apparently differ; and the doctrines of revelation may be far from corresponding in all points with our preconceived ideas of the perfection of reason, however consonant to its dictates. Nevertheless there are some things so clearly discernible by the light of human reason, that it is impossible for us, without discarding it as entirely useless, to doubt of their agreement with right reason or abstract truth. And if it could be proved that revelation really contradicted any of those principles which reason indubitably inculcated, we should, indeed, be reduced to a state of the most distressing perplexity. If Christianity, accompanied as it is with convincing evidence of a divine original, should, in express terms, assert that the substance which we see in the form of bread and wine, is really and truly the body and blood of Christ, and that the same identical body subsists whole and undivided at the same instant of time in a thousand different places; or, if this religion really ascribed all the attributes of Deity to three distinct persons, and yet maintained, in the most unequivocal language, the absolute unity of the divine nature, we might, without hesitation ac-

knowledge that reason and understanding were given us in vain. The simple dictates of reason, which in cases of this nature, have a clearness and certainty, which no species of evidence can supersede, must destroy the authority of revelation, and the evidence by which this revelation is accompanied must, on the other hand, confound every principle of reason, and “amaze indeed the very faculty of eyes and ears.” Happily we are not reduced to this alarming state. Nothing contained in the Christian revelation can, with the least degree of justice, be said to contradict those principles which have any pretence to be styled self-evident. But some will not scruple to affirm, that many articles of the Christian faith may nevertheless be deemed irrational, as not coinciding with the deductions of reason. They think that evident marks of imperfection are discernible in the general scheme; and they fancy, as a certain Spanish monarch is reported to have boasted, with respect to the general system of the universe, that if they had been consulted a much better constitution of things might have been adopted. This mode of arguing proceeds from the most dangerous presumption. Nothing can be more unwarrantable than the rejection of a revelation, authenticated by sufficient evidence, because it may contain some things which may not approve themselves to the understanding of
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the objector. Let us consider how great was the previous improbability, that a human mind should be capable of comprehending the divine councils, and how absurd it is to expect that a scheme, so far above our comprehension, should, in all its parts, approve itself to our limited and finite understandings.

“ Say, of this plan, the bearings and the ties,
The strong connections, nice dependencies,
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul
Look'd thro' ?——

The general tendency of the plan indeed we may reasonably expect should appear to be worthy of its divine author. If it could be fairly proved to be inimical to the interests of truth, virtue and happiness, it would afford an internal argument against the divine origin of it, as powerful as any external arguments which could possibly be produced in its favour. But it is a very weak pretence indeed for withholding our assent, to allege, that those interests are not promoted in that particular manner which we should have deemed most eligible and efficacious.

3dly, It must be confessed that reason, though of admirable use in judging of the evidences and investigating the doctrines of revelation, is yet incapable of producing uniformity of opinion. This the Romanists urge as an irrefragable proof

of that infallibility to which they advance so bold a claim, and which is, as they say, absolutely necessary to the preservation of the unity and the purity of the Christian faith. But, as Dr. Clarke admirably observes, “the true unity of Christians is not a unity of faith in the bond of ignorance, or a unity of profession in the bond of persecution, but a unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

Experience proves that a diversity of sentiments in religion is not attended with those pernicious effects which, in former times, even wise and good men so generally apprehended. Those who “search the scriptures” with a view to their religious improvement, can scarcely fail to imbibe much of the spirit of Christianity, in comparison of which an accurate knowledge of its speculative doctrines is of little consequence. Diversity of opinion affords scope for the exercise of Christian candour; and, should absolute uniformity of sentiment be supposed for ever unattainable, sincerity surely is attainable by all: though it must be confessed that even sincerity is of low estimation when uninfluenced and unenlightened by the mild and benevolent spirit of the gospel. Sincerity is, indeed, an essential branch of religion; but it will of itself go but a very little way towards forming a character of distinguished moral excellence. Virtue consists in an undeviating

viating rectitude of action, resulting from perfect rectitude of principle; but how far short does sincerity fall of this idea of virtue. A man may be sincere, yet almost all his actions may be pernicious; almost all his mental affections and motives of action may be detestable. The sincerity of Bonnor cannot, perhaps, justly be called in question, when, with a firebrand in his hand he appeared like a fiend let loose from hell, raging for revenge, and filling every corner of the land with scenes of blood and horror. Calvin was, without question, sincere, when with unrelenting barbarity he urged the legal murder of Servetus. And St. Paul, whose sincerity, when breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ, no one can doubt, does not scruple to stile himself "the chief of sinners, and not worthy to be called an Apostle" because he persecuted the church of God. "Though I give my body to be burned," says that great Apostle, "and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." The Pharisee in the temple is represented as entertaining a very high idea of his attainments in moral excellence. His sincerity was unimpeached: yet we are assured that the Publican went down to his house justified rather than the other. Let us beware, then, of a delusion so fatal as to imagine that, because we cherish false and flattering notions

notions of our own merits, we cannot justly incur punishment for any species of misconduct proceeding from the most corrupt heart or depraved inclination.

4thly, Although the claim of the Romish church to infallibility, or of any church whatever to any degree of authority, is to be denied and resisted, as a claim wholly unsupported by reason and scripture; as a most daring usurpation over the consciences of mankind; as raising an insurmountable barrier in the way of religious and intellectual improvement, “bringing to one dead level every mind,” and tending to produce an universal torpor of the mental powers; it is not necessary, in order to invalidate this claim, to maintain that all persons are sufficiently qualified to judge for themselves upon religious subjects. It is enough to assert that all men have a right to judge for themselves, as much so on the subject of religion, doubtless, as on that of chronology or astronomy. And, though there may be a considerable difference of opinion amongst those who are best qualified to judge, yet, when perfect freedom of investigation is allowed, and the abilities exerted in the support of opposite opinions may be supposed nearly equal, those who are engaged on the side of truth must, upon the whole, possess a manifest advantage over those who are engaged
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in the cause of error; and, however imperceptible the bias may originally be, if it is real, the effects in time must be apparent. Truth must insensibly and gradually gain ground, till it shall at length attain a decided and permanent superiority: and the experience of all ages demonstrates that the bulk of mankind, secretly conscious of their own incapacity, embrace almost implicitly the opinions of those whose superior station, abilities, and authority justly entitle them to respect and deference, and whose extensive influence is, upon the whole, favourable to the general happiness. By unremitted efforts, also to instruct and enlighten mankind, the number of competent judges must continually increase, and the minds of the multitude will be gradually prepared for the reception of those truths which they may be unequal to the investigation of.

If the majority of Christians in this enlightened country are not properly qualified to decide in controversies of faith, certainly those of Spain and Portugal are much less so. There are degrees of ignorance, and every advance in knowledge is favourable to virtue and happiness. But it is by no means adviseable, because the church of Rome extravagantly claims a right to judge for every private Christian, to embarrass the

the question by maintaining that every private Christian is qualified to judge for himself. The right to judge is, indeed, unquestionable; but the ability to exercise that right is quite another thing, and cannot be supposed to exist in those persons whose worldly occupations and modes of life leave them no leisure for literary and philosophical pursuits.

ESSAY IX.

ON ECCLESIASTICAL ESTABLISHMENTS.

RESPECTING national establishments of religion, two questions immediately present themselves.—Are such establishments lawful in their own nature? And if lawful, are they expedient? It is well known, that a great majority of those learned and venerable divines who relinquished their ecclesiastical preferments and dignities, in consequence of the Act of Uniformity, and whose secession laid the foundation of that grand schism in the Anglican church, which still subsists in full force and vigour, were, by no means, prejudiced against religious establishments as such. They were, in fact, as little inclined to call in question either the lawfulness or the expediency of them, as the generality of their brethren who remained within the pale of the church. They dissented, merely and simply, because they could not, conscientiously, comply with the specific terms imposed by the act.

In modern times, however, the controversy appears to have taken a very different turn; and it seems now to be considered by the popular
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apologists of nonconformity as a leading principle of dissent from the church, that establishments are, in every form, and under every modification, absolutely unjust and unlawful; that the civil magistrate assumes an authority manifestly foreign to his character and office, when he interposes, in any manner, or under any pretext whatever, in matters purely religious; that it is his incumbent duty to protect, without distinction or partiality, all classes and descriptions of men, in the enjoyment of those religious, as well as civil rights and privileges, which human nature justly claims as its most sacred prerogative, and indefeasible birth-right; that a *Christian magistrate*, in particular, is chargeable with a direct and palpable usurpation of the supremacy of Christ, as sole king and head of the church, when he openly assumes the stile, and exercises the office, of supreme head of the church, in his own person, not only without a divine commission, but in express contradiction and contempt of those clear and positive declarations of sacred writ, that “the kingdom of Christ is not of this world;” that “dominion shall not be exercised over the faith of Christians;” and that “every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.” In a word, it is said that the temporal, and not the eternal happiness of mankind, is the proper object of temporal authority; that

that religion is a personal concern; that every individual, therefore, as he is most interested to discover, is, most indubitably, entitled to adopt those means which he conceives to be best calculated to secure the glorious rewards of virtue in a future and immortal state of existence; that to annex temporal advantages or emoluments to the belief or profession of any system of religious opinions, is an assumption of power absolutely irreconcilable with the genius and spirit of that divine religion which it pretends to establish; for Christianity is an appeal to the reason and understandings of mankind: establishments are an address to their prejudices and passions.

These arguments, and others similar to these, which have repeatedly been urged with great force, and sometimes with great vehemence and asperity, have been answered, by the learned advocates for the establishment, Balguy, Sturgis, Paley, &c. with much moderation, candour, and strength of reasoning. The sole prerogative of Christ, as king and head of the church, to exercise dominion and authority over the faith of Christians, they are far from presuming to controvert; and the inherent right of every man to adopt what to him appears the most probable means of advancing his future and everlasting happiness, they most readily admit. But these fundamental axioms, as they allege, do not, in
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slightest degree, militate against the establishment of any religious institution, however general its object, or extensive its basis, which is of a nature purely voluntary. Invidiously to contrast the church of England with the church of Christ, and to point out, by elaborate comparison, the difference which subsists between them, is to little purpose, unless it can be proved, that the church of England, like the church of Rome, assumes to itself the title and prerogatives of the church of Christ. But the church of England, in common with all other protestant churches, profess merely to be "a society of faithful men," voluntarily united in Christian fellowship, for the purpose of mutual edification. Whoever approves of the general principles of faith and worship, adopted by this or any other particular church or society of Christians, whether it happens to be invested with any civil immunities or not, may, doubtless, without any departure from that liberty with which Christ has made him free, become a member of it. Nay, it is an essential branch of this liberty, that he should possess, unmolested and uncontrolled, this important and invaluable privilege. As to the interposition of the magistrate in matters of religion, it must, indeed, be acknowledged, that he has no right to impose any kind or degree of restraint on the consciences of individuals, unless the plea of conscience be so perverted

perverted, as to become a pretext for public or private injury. But how is this principle incompatible with the right, or rather the duty of the magistrate, to establish and protect, by various modes of encouragement and reward, all such institutions as are, in their general tendency, conducive to the general purposes of good government? Is not religion closely connected with morality? And is not morality closely connected with the order and happiness of civil society, and with all the wise and beneficial purposes of just and equitable government? How, then, can it be affirmed, in consistency with truth, that the civil magistrate ought not to concern himself about religion? So far as religion is the great support of morality, and so far as morality is the great support of the social system, it is, evidently, a concern, and a most important concern, of the magistrate, whose incumbent duty it is to promote the public good by all such means as are not subversive of public or private rights. And though any restraint upon the exercise of private judgment in religion would, indeed, be a flagrant encroachment upon the natural rights of mankind, yet the power of annexing privileges and immunities to the public profession of that religion, which the magistrate conceives to be most agreeable to truth, and best calculated to advance the general interests of the community,

is a power so far from being foreign, that it is clearly and necessarily included in the very definition of the magisterial office; whose nature and essence it is, to promote the general happiness by all such means as are not inconsistent with any natural or indefeasible rights. National establishments of religion are, in fact, nothing more than provisions made by the governors of a state for advancing the knowledge and practice of religion and virtue. According to this idea, they stand upon the same basis, and may properly be referred to the same general rank with all public institutions for the cultivation of the minds, and improvement of the morals of men; only, when well constructed, incomparably superior to them all in weight, influence, and dignity, and productive of proportionably higher advantages.

Another class of persons, perhaps less numerous, but far more judicious than the former, readily admit the conclusiveness of these abstract reasonings in favour of the lawfulness of religious establishments; and are far from the extravagance of asserting them to be, under every possible modification, unrighteous and anti-christian; but who, nevertheless, entertain great doubts respecting the expediency and utility of these institutions; who deem them, upon the whole, not calculated to answer the purposes for
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which they are designed; who consider them, in a word, not as unjust, but as unwise. The experience of past ages, they affirm, fully demonstrate the utter incapacity of the civil magistrate to exercise the office of a judge of truth: as an impartial examination must convince us, that the religious establishments of all countries, in fact, tend only to establish error; and the grossest absurdities, when once they constitute a part of the religion of the state, are converted into sacred mysteries, and cannot be eradicated without infinite labour and difficulty. Truth disdains all adventitious aid. She relies upon her own power and energy. A reward annexed to the profession or belief of truth is, evidently, superfluous; and of error, certainly mischievous. Christianity, we know, gradually and insensibly gained ground, in spite of all the opposition of the temporal powers, for three centuries previous to its establishment by Constantine. Can we possibly suppose, that it would not have been able to maintain its ground when that opposition ceased, though no alliance had ever taken place between the church and state? Truth is but one; error is manifold. The probability, therefore, is obvious, that error, and not truth, will be established by the civil magistrate, whose natural capacity of discernment is, certainly, not superior to that of other men; and truth, consequently,

instead of being promoted, will only have, as there is reason to fear, an additional and formidable obstacle to surmount.

To this reasoning, plausible as it appears, it has been with at least equal plausibility answered, that we are under a necessity of regulating our conduct, public as well as private, upon fixed and general principles; and that the justice or wisdom of the principles themselves are not at all impeached by any misapplication of them in particular instances. It is obviously a duty incumbent upon the magistrate to advance by the most effectual means, under every possible form and modification, the happiness and welfare of the community entrusted to his faithful and guardian care. As the knowledge of truth and the practice of virtue, therefore, are connected with the general welfare and happiness, they necessarily become objects of his attention and concern. And it is to no purpose to object that he is liable to be imposed upon by false appearances, and consequently to adopt wrong means in order to attain to right ends. For this objection must affect all the powers and functions of government alike; and upon this principle, the magistrate must do *nothing* from the apprehension of doing *wrong*. And the same reasoning may indeed be extended to each individual, whether in public or private life, who would thus be precluded
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from taking any active measures whatever to promote the interests of truth and virtue, under the influence of the same general apprehension that he may, in fact, be the unconscious instrument of promoting evil and error. What, indeed, is the civil magistrate, but an individual possessing great and extensive powers, which he is under an obligation to employ, like other individuals, for the general benefit? If then the magistrate acts upon this just and equitable principle, it is fairly presumable, that he will himself participate no less of the benefits to be derived from the free and unrestrained discussion of truth, and the general increase of wisdom and knowledge resulting from it, than other men: and his mind, or rather the public mind, being gradually more enlightened, wiser, better, and more effectual measures will be adopted for the advancement of the general interests of truth, virtue, and happiness. And it must be acknowledged, that where a regard to these great and transcendent objects really engages the attention and influences the conduct, a very great mixture of human weakness and error in the choice of the means, will not totally prevent or frustrate their accomplishment. That Christianity, in consequence of the intrepidity and zeal of the primitive Christians, and the strength of the evidence, external and internal, by which it was accompanied, was able to force

its way into the world, not only without the assistance, but in direct opposition to the united efforts of the temporal powers, is true. But there appears no sufficient reason to conclude from thence, that if the temporal powers had been originally not adverse but friendly to this religion, and had adopted such wise and salutary measures, as were best calculated to diffuse the knowledge of Christianity in its native purity and excellence, that it would not at a much earlier period have met with a more favourable or more general reception. Christianity, we are indeed taught to believe, will ultimately become the religion of the universe. But whoever infers from this acknowledged truth that natural or human means of diffusing and perpetuating the knowledge and belief of our holy religion, are superfluous or useless, and that religious truth may safely be left *to rely on its own energies*, may as justly assert the same of philosophical truth—that the systems of LOCKE or NEWTON, for instance, need not be taught in schools or colleges, because the force of the evidence attending them is such, that they *must* make their way in the world, whether any means are used to *prepare* the way for their reception or not.

Another question yet remains of a nature more interesting and delicate than either of the former, viz. How far is that establishment of religion
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which exists in our own age and country, calculated to produce the general interests of truth and virtue? In answer to this enquiry, it must be acknowledged that the English liturgy is, in its general structure and radical principles, founded on the basis of the purest morality, and the most rational and sublime devotion. But when we direct our attention to the speculative *dogmata* with which this system of morality and devotion is connected, as exhibited in the creeds and articles of the church; what a contrast! What impartial enquirer in the present age can possibly give his “unfeigned assent and consent” to those doctrines, so incredible in themselves, and so opposite to all our natural ideas of rectitude and justice, that even one of the most eminent and zealous of their advocates is compelled to acknowledge, that “at the contemplation of them reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded.”* If these are really the doctrines of revelation, in what records are they to be found? Certainly not in those sacred books which are commonly supposed to contain the history, and to exhibit the principles of our religion. Happily that divine religion, as it is there represented, appears perfectly simple, obvious, and intelligible to the meanest capacity. Inasmuch, that it was originally upon that very account, to the Jews

* Hurd's Sermons.

whose minds were wholly pre-occupied by ideas of temporal grandeur, a stumbling block; and by the Greeks, attached to the subtilties of a vain philosophy, deemed foolishness; though by the highest authority and upon the most incontrovertible evidence, declared and demonstrated to be the power of God and the wisdom of God. In vain do we reject the Popish doctrine of transubstantiation, while we retain and venerate, as the most sacred of all mysteries, the Popish invention of the Trinity. And whilst, by the aid of that scholastic jargon, falsely stiled the creed of Athanasius, we vainly attempt to explain impossibilities and to reconcile contradictions, we expose our understandings as well as our religion to the humiliating derision or the more humiliating pity of the exulting infidel.

The fatal necessity under which the English clergy labour, of subscribing to a confession of faith which is absolutely contrary both to scripture and to reason, is evidently productive of the most unhappy effects. It excites an earnest though secret wish to shrink from the investigation of truth. It effectually prevents the principles of Christianity from becoming, in our national seminaries of education, the subject of unrestrained and philosophical discussion. It has an obvious and direct tendency to generate that indifference for religion which is so remarkably the characteristic of the present age. It damps the exertions and chills the zeal
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of those who are the real friends and lovers of truth, by exposing their most laudable and successful efforts to the reproach of insincerity, inconsistency, and criminal prevarication.

Those who possess any share of generous sensibility, who have ever “wiped their eyes of drops which sacred pity hath engendered,” must have experienced the strongest emotions of sympathy, on witnessing the distress and embarrassment of such, and many such there are, who with a strong bias in favour of virtue, though not absolutely endued with a spirit of martyrdom, are called upon to offer the most reluctant violence to the moral feelings, by publicly declaring their approbation of sentiments and doctrines which reason indignantly rejects. With such impressions, it is impossible not to wish that an apology for clerical conformity could be offered, not only plausible, but satisfactory and just. The point to be determined is simply this: Whether subscription, in the circumstances now stated, involves in it a criminal violation of truth? Truth, as it relates to social intercourse, may justly be defined *an adherence to promise*: and the essence of truth consists in a punctual fulfilment of those expectations which have been intentionally raised. If all promises, whether explicitly or implicitly made, were strictly adhered to, and all expectations intentionally excited, were invariably and scrupulously

scrupulously fulfilled, how, properly speaking, could truth ever be said to be violated? That mutual confidence, which ought ever to subsist between man and man, would suffer no interruption; and mankind in general would receive all that benefit and advantage from truth which it is in its own nature calculated to afford. If we apply these ideas to the case of subscription, we must acknowledge that, in a moral and philosophical sense, truth is not violated by that class of men whose conduct respecting this point we are now considering. They make no promises, they enter into no engagements which they do not mean to fulfil, in the sense in which they profess to make them. They are not chargeable with intentionally or insidiously raising expectations which they mean to disappoint. They avow their sentiments without reserve, and disclaim without hesitation every idea of embracing any propositions, as articles of faith, the truth of which cannot be proved by "certain warrant of scripture." With this limitation, indeed, a limitation which the church itself approves and admits, (*Vide Article 22.*) they are willing to give their assent to the articles proposed; and an assent, so limited and qualified, can never be fairly considered as subject to the imputation of deceit, hypocrisy, and prevarication.

On the one hand, terms are proposed; on the other,

other, a virtual declaration is made in what sense, and under what limitation these terms are complied with. If the party proposing is satisfied that they should be so understood and limited, how is mutual confidence, or, in other words, how is truth violated? This is one of those cases in which it is allowable to consult and to be guided by the "*animus imponentis*." And to the question "*Quis imposuit?*" it is obvious to reply, Not the Bishop, for he is employed, in his official capacity, merely to receive the declaration: Not the compilers of the articles, for they are no more the imposers of subscription, than a solicitor, employed to make the draft of a revenue bill, is the imposer of the tax: Not even the parliament which originally enacted the law; for it is a manifest absurdity to represent any persons as parties in a transaction, which does not take place for ages after they have ceased to exist. In short, the legislature actually subsisting at the time such declaration is required, and by whose authority the requisition is made, is the party whose intention is in this case to be considered. And that the legislature is, in fact, willing to allow all that latitude of interpretation which is here contended for, is too evident to need a formal proof. Those celebrated divines, the glory of the English church, who have most widely departed from the letter of her creeds and her articles,

ticles, have been, in numerous instances, advanced to the highest ecclesiastical dignities, when the whole world was made acquainted with their opinions by means of their admirable writings, and when their activity and zeal, in supporting and diffusing their sentiments, were most conspicuous. “The universal consent of a nation,” says the celebrated and excellent Jortin, “to deviate in some points from the old doctrines, amounts to an abrogation of such rigid interpretation of the articles, and to the permission of a latitude in subscribing.”

Nothing here advanced, however, is meant to derogate from the superior merit of those men, who, under a persuasion that the cause of virtue, religion and truth is endangered by acting upon these problematic principles, have the magnanimity and fortitude to relinquish all their temporal prospects for the sake of a clear conscience; and who must be allowed to rank in the highest class of human characters. All that candor itself can contend for is, that a compliance with the terms of conformity, in the circumstances now stated, is not necessarily to be interpreted as a dereliction of sincerity or of integrity. It seems in itself capable of at least a plausible and decent vindication, though it were devoutly to be wished that all these dangerous refinements in morality were rendered superfluous, by an ecclesiastical

fiastical reform conducted upon truly Protestant principles. One cannot sufficiently lament that our national establishment should be so constituted that men of the most distinguished moral excellence, Christians eminent for the superiority of their intellectual talents, and the ardor and success with which they have exerted them in the cause of true religion, should be under the necessity of relinquishing or declining her communion. Surely a period will arrive when she shall be permitted to assume a more benignant and inviting form: when the feeble and ineffectual barriers, with which she is now embarrassed and incumbered, shall be completely demolished: and she shall be deemed sufficiently secure when protected by reason, unbiaſſed by authority, on the one hand; and revelation, unperverted by any human glosses or explanations, on the other.

ESSAY X.

ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN VIRTUE AND
HAPPINESS.

IN one of the discourses, published some years since by a justly celebrated professor of rhetoric, Dr. Blair, we meet with the following passage: “ Unjust are our complaints of the promiscuous distribution made by providence of its favors among men. From superficial views such complaints arise. The distribution of the goods of fortune, indeed, may often be promiscuous, that is, disproportioned to the moral characters of men; but the allotment of real happiness is never so.” But it is to be feared that such a view and representation of life as this is little better than romance. It is too evident that virtue and happiness are not inseparably united; that, when they are found in actual union, it seldom happens that the degree of happiness, enjoyed by any individual, bears an exact proportion to the degree of virtue he possesses; and, in no instance, perhaps, is that precise degree of happiness the sole and necessary result of the virtuous principle. It may be thought that these are very dangerous concessions, such as tend to weaken the

the interests of virtue ; and, if generally received, to discourage mankind from the practice of it. But the interests of virtue can never surely be promoted by deserting the interests of truth. If weak and erroneous arguments are employed to induce men to become virtuous, it is a real service to the general cause of virtue to expose the fallacy of them, and to erect her empire upon a firm and permanent basis. A man, who enters life under a persuasion that virtue and happiness are inseparably united, and that happiness bears a certain and determinate *ratio* to virtue, and who forms a resolution of leading a life of virtue upon so narrow and selfish a principle, will find the ground upon which he stands very unstable and slippery. And, when that persuasion is once shaken, which will infallibly happen from a more enlarged acquaintance with the world, he must be in imminent danger of apostatizing from those principles and resolutions upon which he proposed to regulate his conduct.

In attempting to ascertain the importance of a virtuous conduct and disposition, we must proceed upon one of the following suppositions. 1st, That mankind are of certainty destined for a future state of existence, in which their happiness or misery will bear an exact proportion to the degrees of moral excellence or depravity to which they have arrived in the present

sent life. Secondly, That it is only probable or possible this may be the case, and this probability may be infinitely varied in the apprehension of different individuals, agreeably to the nature of the evidence adduced. Or, 3dly, That there is no future state of existence, and that death is the total extinction of our sentient and percipient powers. It would be superfluous to multiply arguments to prove, on the two former of these hypotheses, that it is our highest interest to adopt that mode of conduct which is best calculated to secure our happiness throughout that endless duration to which we are certainly, or even with the slightest degree of probability destined. But, upon the third supposition, it becomes a very nice and curious question indeed, how far it is the interest of a man to adhere inviolably, and in all circumstances, to the undeviating line of rectitude. In general, it cannot be doubted that virtue is more favourable to happiness than vice: but it would be an arduous task to persuade a mere man of the world, whose views extended no farther than this life, that his highest happiness depended upon his scrupulously conforming to the dictates of a pure and perfect morality. It would evidently be fruitless and even ridiculous to attempt to make any impression upon such a man, by expatiating upon the native beauty and excellence of
virtue;

virtue; upon its utility in promoting the general interests of mankind; and upon the conscious satisfaction which would result from the love and practice of it. This would be to use a language which he could not comprehend. The idea of virtue abstractedly considered for such a man has no charms. The advancement of general happiness is to him a matter of perfect indifference, and instead of a conscious satisfaction in the practice of virtue, he is conscious only of a fixed and unconquerable reluctance to conform to its dictates. Such a man has no relish for the refined pleasures of the moral sense, and it cannot be denied that he adds to his happiness by indulging, to a certain degree at least, all his vicious propensities. How is this then consistent with the hypothesis, that the allotment of happiness is never disproportioned to the moral characters of men?

But perhaps it may be said, that this is not a fair statement of the case, and that all which is meant by recommending virtue as the true source of happiness is, that it will certainly be found so by those in whom the moral sense has been early and diligently cultivated, whose modes of thinking and habits of acting have been pre-disposed from infancy in favour of virtue, and in whom the benevolent affections flourish in full life and vigour. And certainly it would be rash to as-

firm, that the world affords not any such examples. The faculty of *association* is of a nature at once so powerful and so flexible, that, by early and skilful direction, it is, no doubt, possible, such an ardent and disinterested love of virtue, such a noble and animating principle of benevolence may be generated in the soul, that, leaving the very idea of a future state out of the question, all the allurements of vice united would, to a man actuated by such exalted sentiments, appear contemptible in comparison of the pleasures to be derived from virtue. But, then, a few such examples are by no means sufficient to establish the truth of the general maxim, that the virtuous are happy in proportion to the degree of virtue they possess; nor, indeed, is it necessarily to be inferred, that a man such as we have in contemplation, who has arrived at the highest degree of moral perfection of which humanity is capable, must be therefore eminently happy; but only that he would, in consequence of the exquisite delicacy of his moral feelings, incur a greater degree of misery by any occasional deviations into vice, than by a resolute adherence to virtue, whatever personal inconveniences might result from the practice of it. Indeed, from the very nature of virtue, it is easy to demonstrate, that it cannot, in all situations and circumstances, be the interest of individuals invariably

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to adhere it. For the essence of virtue consists in regulating our conduct by such principles as are best calculated to advance the general happiness. Now, as it frequently happens that the happiness of the individual stands in direct opposition to that of the public, it is the perfection of virtue in individuals, in such cases, to sacrifice their own happiness to that of others. But if we do not advert to that recompence of reward, of which a future state of retribution affords us a prospect, how can such a sacrifice be rationally expected, or, indeed, how can it be rationally made? Here, then, is the grand, the remediless defect of that system of morality, which extends not its views beyond the present life. Self-love and social are not the same; *i. e.* are not necessarily connected; and this defect becomes only the more apparent from every attempt to palliate or disguise it, or to substitute any other principle in the place of that just, solid, and permanent foundation of human conduct, a regard to our own true interest.

The most celebrated sect of heathen philosophers, viz. the Stoics, it is well known, preposterously endeavoured to establish a system of perfect virtue on the basis of pride. By an inflexible adherence to her most rigorous dictates, they boasted, that they not only acquired an elevation of mind far superior to the base and igno-

ble vulgar, for whom they did not pretend that this system was calculated, but that they were raised to an equality with the gods themselves. They asserted that virtue was not merely the chief good, which their rivals, the Peripatetics, were content to maintain, but that it was the sole good; and that the truly virtuous man must necessarily be supremely happy in the enjoyment of that good, in all possible situations and circumstances, even whilst actually burning in the brazen bull of Phalaris. But philosophers of modern times, to do them justice, keep at a safe and measureless distance from any such excess of virtuous extravagance. Mr. Hume, in his *Treatise on Morals*, in the opposite tone of softness and indulgence, like the fashionable preachers of the present day, paints virtue in the most charming colours. "Nothing appears," to use his own words, "but gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affability. She talks not of useless austerity and rigour, suffering and self-denial: she declares that her sole purpose is to make her votaries, and all mankind, during every instant of their existence, if possible, chearful and happy; nor does she ever willingly part with any pleasure but in hopes of ample compensation in some other period of their lives. The sole trouble which she demands is that of just calculation, and a steady preference of the greater happiness."

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This is a most pleasing picture of virtue, and who, without reluctance, can dispute the justness of the resemblance? it is, however, like most other portraits of great artists, a flattering likeness. "The sole trouble which virtue demands is that of just calculation." But upon what *data* is this calculation to be founded? Upon the supposition of a future state? Then virtue ceases to be that smiling, gay, and enchanting goddess described by Mr. Hume. She assumes another countenance, not, indeed, destitute of beauty, but of a severe and awful kind: her deportment is martial, and her air majestic; not a Venus but a Minerva, armed with helmet, spear, and shield. In plain language, we cannot become really and truly virtuous, at so cheap a rate as such flattering indications would seem to indicate. It requires great faith, great fortitude, great resolution, and, however unpleasant the words may sound in our ears, in very many situations of life, great suffering and self-denial, to attain to any very superior degrees of virtue. The grand maxim which we are ever to keep in view is, that we are absolutely prohibited to gratify, in a single instance, our own interests, passions, or inclinations, whenever they are, in the remotest degree, repugnant to the general happiness. And, on the other hand, that it is incumbent upon us, by all possible means, to promote the general welfare,

fare, and even to sacrifice ease, fame, fortune, and life itself, whenever they come in competition with those far superior considerations, to which virtue exacts an absolute and unreserved submission.

But the virtue which Mr. Hume means to recommend is of a very different complexion. It is, indeed, but another word for pleasure; for, according to his principles of calculation, it is sufficient to strike the balance here, and to give the preference to that mode of conduct which shall be productive of the greatest sum of happiness to each individual in this world; for he is equally ready, with Macbeth, “to jump the life to come.” He seems, indeed, willing enough to persuade his readers, that the personal happiness of each individual coincides with the general happiness of mankind; but his reasoning on this head is so trifling and evasive, that it can only tend to enforce, instead of alleviating the weight of this formidable objection. “If,” says he, “a sensible knave allege, that though, as a general rule, it must be acknowledged that honesty is the best policy, yet it is a rule liable to many exceptions; and he must be allowed to conduct himself with most wisdom who observes the general rule, and takes advantage of all the exceptions. If a man thinks that this reasoning much *requires an answer*, it will be a little

little difficult to find any which will, to him, appear satisfactory and convincing. If his heart rebel not against such pernicious maxims, if he feels no reluctance to the thoughts of villany or baseness, he has, indeed, lost a considerable motive to virtue, and we may expect that his practice will be answerable to his speculations."

Now, certainly, there are many who will acknowledge, without a blush, that they think this reasoning very much *requires an answer*, whose hearts rebel against such pernicious maxims as strongly as Mr. Hume's. But, surely, the proper question in this case is, not in what manner the feelings of men educated in habits of virtue would prompt them to act? but whether the objection is really well founded, and what influence a system of morals, liable to such an objection, would produce upon the sum of human life and happiness? Mr. Hume admits the objection to be, strictly speaking, unanswerable; but endeavours to raise a feeble barrier in support of virtue, by opposing to its attacks certain mental feelings and associations, which are known to be accidental, variable, and factitious. "Those who are destitute of these feelings," says he, "have, undoubtedly, lost a considerable motive to virtue." This is too true; but then they stand the more in need of some other motive less flexible in its nature, and more general in its

operation: but this the philosophy of Mr. Hume does not supply. Upon his principles, virtue must depend upon honour for her very existence. Honour is, indeed, “ a sacred tie, the noble mind’s distinguishing perfection!” But if we imagine that mankind will ever be greatly or generally influenced by a principle so refined and ideal, we indulge a groundless and romantic expectation. To banish the belief of a future state from a system of morality, would lead to consequences as dangerous and fatal as a total abolition of penal laws would produce, in the framing or new modelling a plan of civil polity. And if any one presumed to hint his apprehensions, that the interests of virtue might, eventually, suffer from such abolition, would it be deemed very satisfactory for “ a moral philosopher” to stand up, and say, “ that men of ingenuous minds had an antipathy to vice too strong to be counter-balanced by any views of profit or pecuniary advantage; that inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct, these are circumstances very requisite to happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by every honest man who feels the importance of them.*” Notwithstanding this fine harangue, the necessity would soon become ap-

* Vide Hume’s Essays, Vol. II. p. 350.

parent in this, as in many other cases, of making “ the lofty head of speculation bow to groveling experience !”

Enough, it may be hoped, has been said to establish, upon a solid foundation, the following conclusions :

First, As it is a truth which cannot, so it is a truth which needs not to be concealed or palliated, that virtue is not necessarily productive of, or connected with temporal happiness. “ *Dies deficiet,*” says the Roman orator, “ *si velim numerare quibus bonis male evenerit : nec minus si commoremur quibus improbis optime.*” To maintain that we are happy in exact proportion as we are virtuous, is, in other words, to assert, with the ancient Stoics, that virtue is the only good ; *i. e.* the sole source of our enjoyments ; an opinion so contrary to fact and experience, that it is wonderful any man can seriously attempt to defend it. Are the pleasures we receive from the senses, exquisitely fashioned and organized as is the human form divine, to be left entirely out of the account ? Are the pleasures of imagination nothing ? Or do we derive no addition to our happiness from our literary and intellectual pursuits ? If the moral sense is carefully cherished and cultivated, it is, indeed, the source of a very sublime and exalted species of enjoyment. On some occasions, however, it is rather the source of pain
than

than pleasure; and the more virtuous a man is, the larger sacrifices of private happiness he is disposed to make to the general good; so that it may well admit of a doubt, if he has no future reward in prospect, whether, upon the whole, his happiness would be promoted by an undeviating perseverance in a course of the most perfect virtue to which a human being can attain. It should seem that virtue of a lower standard, and mixed with a considerable portion of alloy, is, frequently, better calculated for the purposes of this world merely. Hope and fear are the two grand springs by which that curious machine, the human mind, is actuated; and to deprive virtue of that support which she receives from their influence and operation, and to substitute, in their room, a sense of honour, or a love of moral beauty and order, is to betray the cause of virtue. Secured by the awful sanctions of religion, the temple of virtue stands, unshaken, upon a rock.—Whereas these, her false or mistaken friends, would fain subvert that firm and solid foundation, and erect, in lieu of it, an house for her upon the sand. But, to adopt the sacred language of scripture, “When the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon that house, it will inevitably fall, and great will be the fall of it.”—Hence,

2dly,

2dly, It is most unquestionably certain, that religion is of essential use and importance in promoting the temporal interests and felicity of mankind. Were the belief of a God, of a providence, and of a future state, banished from the world, it is evident that morality would stand upon a totally different foundation from that on which it now rests. We should no longer be under an obligation, *i. e.* we should no longer have any rational or sufficient inducement to sacrifice our own happiness to that of others. Every individual would have a separate and detached interest, which it would, in that case, be his highest wisdom to pursue, however contrary it might happen to be to that of his neighbour or of the public. A principle of generosity might, indeed, deter some men from embracing opportunities of promoting their own happiness at the expence of others: but generosity would be a feeble restraint, indeed, upon the great majority of mankind; who when the powerful feelings of remorse and fear were extinguished, would be little scrupulous in gratifying, to the utmost extent, every passion and inclination, however depraved and corrupt, which could, in their apprehension, conduce to their own personal enjoyment. And the more completely a man could divest himself of every virtuous feeling and sympathetic emotion, the more powerful, in fact, would

would be his inducement, the more it would be his *interest*, if one may be allowed to use an expression at which the mind revolts, to sacrifice the happiness of others to his avarice, his ambition, or his revenge. It must, however, be acknowledged, that the evidence which nature affords of the great truths of religion scarcely amounts to probability. Upon that probability, weak as it is, had we no better guide, it would, nevertheless, be our duty and our wisdom to act. But the truth is, that though in speculation it is impossible to deny that such a probability ought to influence our conduct, as much as even a certainty, the impression made by it is so weak, that it has never been found to produce any general or permanent effect upon the hearts and lives of mankind. The human mind is so constituted, as to stand in need of a species of evidence amounting much nearer to moral certainty, in order to effect any great practical purpose. How invaluable an advantage, then, ought the Christian revelation to be deemed, which is so admirably adapted to the wants and wishes of man; which exhibits the grand doctrines of religion in a light so just and clear; which enforces them by such solemn and alarming sanctions, and which confirms and establishes the truth of them by a chain of evidence the most astonishing, the most convincing, the most decisive. This religion has
already

already produced effects highly favourable to the happiness of the human race, and those who are persuaded of its divine authority have the firmest reliance that it shall rise triumphant over all opposition ; and that the knowledge and beneficial influence of it shall, at length, cover the face of the whole earth, as the waters cover the sea.

ESSAY XI.

ON VIRTUE AND MORAL OBLIGATION.

BETWEEN moral and metaphysical disquisitions there is a strict and intimate connection; and just, liberal, and comprehensive ideas respecting these branches of philosophy are perhaps attended with effects interesting and important beyond all others, and with more immediate and extensive influence on the general welfare and happiness. They have been the favourite theme and study of the best and wisest of mankind in every age; and yet no class of speculative writers are more frequently insulted by sciolists and men of the world with the question, *Cui bono?* Of what use are your speculations? Abashed by the supercilious effrontery of these insolent interrogators, the philosopher is compelled amid the blushes of confusion to acknowledge that his researches, however successful, are of no use in the view or estimation of the enquirers. For they are not designed for the amusement of literary indolence, or calculated to clear the path to the acquisition of honor, fame, or fortune. The sole object of these difficult

ficult and abstruse investigations is to develop the nature and powers of the human mind ; to ascertain the just rule of life and conduct ; to explain the obligations incumbent upon man, the sanctions by which those obligations are enforced ; and by inspiring and diffusing noble and elevated principles of action amongst the higher ranks of society, gradually to extend the sphere of liberty, virtue and happiness, so that it may ultimately embrace, if it be possible, every individual of the human race. In every age there exists a certain system of opinions, by the influence of which men are guided and actuated. This system, and every successive alteration and improvement of it, must originate with philosophical and speculative men. Of how great importance then is it that these instructors of the universe seek to qualify themselves for their high office, by the most accurate, laborious, and impartial investigation. These are the men who silently and invisibly direct the movements of the mighty lever by which the intellectual world is swayed and governed.

Of all the various subjects of philosophical speculation, it must be acknowledged that nothing can exceed in practical influence or importance the enquiry respecting the nature of virtue and moral obligation. VIRTUE may be defined as the most excellent or eligible rule of life

life and conduct. What then is this rule, and how is it to be distinguished and ascertained? In answer to this enquiry, a variety of fanciful and visionary, though ingenious and specious theories have been advanced. Of these it is not necessary to descend to a particular analysis. As far as they are deserving of attention, they are perhaps resolvable into the two essentially and obviously distinct hypotheses, of which Dr. Clarke and Mr. Hume may be considered as the most distinguished and illustrious advocates.

THE sole and unalterable rule of human actions, says Dr. Clarke, is RECTITUDE; and in this the essence of virtue consists. There results, says this great philosopher, from the absolute reason and nature of things, even separate from and antecedent to the positive will and command of GOD, certain necessary and eternal differences and relations, from which arise various moral fitnesses, agreements or proportions, to which GOD himself, from the absolute rectitude and immaculate perfection of his nature, voluntarily and invariably conforms; and to which, so far as they are discernible by the light of human reason, we are under an eternal and indispensable obligation to submit.

This obligation arises primarily and necessarily from the original constitution of things, which makes it fit and reasonable for creatures thus to
act

act, whether happiness be or be not the result of an inflexible and undeviating adherence to the rule of rectitude. It follows, therefore, that the positive will and command of GOD, a submission to which includes the highest certainty of ultimate happiness, is in itself, however superior in practical importance, of inferior and secondary obligation. And in strict propriety the divine will, and the sanctions with which it is accompanied, may be considered not as constituting a new, but enforcing a prior obligation. The eternal reason of things, that reason which is the rule of action to GOD himself, is alone obligatory upon his rational offspring. And this obligation is as absolute and unalterable as the law, the absolute and unalterable law of reason from which it results. And the essential differences, agreements and relations upon which this law is founded, are in their nature as incapable of any degree of change or shadow of turning as the first axioms of geometrical science. And he who should contend that truth, justice, temperance and charity, do not in themselves possess more of intrinsic excellence than the opposite vices, may as plausibly and as rationally assert that the whole is not equal to all its parts, or that a square is not double to a triangle of equal base and height.

This, it must be acknowledged, is a very bold, lofty, and sublime system of morals: and so imperious is its language and imposing its aspect, that its advocates appear to deem it unnecessary to seek for clear or specific arguments in vindication of it; but, confidently leaving it to rest upon the basis of its own intrinsic evidence, content themselves with appealing to the feelings, the conscience and the understanding of every man, whether they do not bear an internal and involuntary testimony to the truth of these principles; of which, say they, such is the importance and such the stability, that if these fail, “the pillared firmament is rottenness, and earth’s base built on stubble.”

Of this supreme and immutable rule of action Cicero says, “*Est quidem vera lex recta ratio naturæ congruens, diffusa in omnes, constans, sempiterna, quæ vocet ad officium jubendo, vetando a fraude deterreat. Huic legi nec abrogari fas est, neque derogari ex hac aliquid licet, neque tota abrogari potest.*” And again, “*Erat enim ratio profecta a rerum natura, & ad recte faciendum impellens, & a delicto avocans; quæ non tum denique incipit lex esse cum scripta est, sed tum cum orta est; orta autem simul est cum mente divina.*”

In opposition to this popular and splendid system, Mr. Hume first ventured in regular form to
advance

advance a theory, which he thought it, however, necessary to inculcate with much caution and address, as conscious that he was in danger of incurring, by his temerity, no small degree of odium and indignation; though it has gradually insinuated itself into favor, and is at this time embraced and openly avowed by many Christian, as well as sceptical moralists; amongst the former of whom we find the distinguished names of a Priestley and a Paley. "The essence of virtue," says Mr. Hume, "is UTILITY." Morality is founded solely upon the basis of general utility: and this is the law by which human life and conduct ought to be regulated. This is a theory which pretends not to assume the lofty tone of the abstract and sublime philosophy to which it stands opposed. It objects not to be considered as far less dignified, awful, and majestic. It modestly claims only the advantage of being easy, intelligible and rational. It professes to reduce the rule of conduct to the level of plain truth and common sense. Nothing, say the advocates of this hypothesis, is really valuable but happiness: neither power, nor wisdom, nor learning, nor liberty, nor virtue, being of any estimation or importance, but as they contribute to its production. Happiness, then, according to this theory, is the sole end and object of existence; and virtue is represented as entirely

subordinate to it, being merely the rule resulting not from the abstract nature but the positive relations and tendencies of things; by the observance of which the general happiness is most effectually attained or promoted. The established rules of morality, therefore, are not of absolute, unalterable and indispensable obligation; for virtue, if the means, and nothing more than the means of advancing the general happiness, may occasionally, and in peculiar circumstances, justify and even demand a deviation from those rules, in order to accomplish the end for which alone they were originally established. If we are required to yield obedience to the abstract law of rectitude, regardless of consequences, it is natural, it is reasonable to ask upon what basis of authority this law is founded? If nothing can be alleged but its own intrinsic beauty, truth, and excellence, it is obvious to reply that this high sounding language is merely the splendid disguise of ignorance, the unintelligible jargon of mysticism; and these mystical moralists would be employed very properly and consistently in determining what that species of excellence is good for which is good for nothing. They who extol the truth, beauty, and harmony of virtue, exclusive of its consequences, deal but in pompous nonsense. By the force of early, repeated, and habitual associations, we form, indeed, vivid, indelible,

indelible, and what are very easily imagined to be innate ideas of the abstract, independent, and native excellence of virtue. If we take the trouble, however, to analyze these ideas, we shall find that all the rules of just and rational morality are subservient to utility; that, in the entire catalogue of virtues, no one quality is suffered to obtrude which is not conducive to the general happiness; that in whatever degree of respect or veneration, therefore, virtue may be held, and to the most unlimited veneration it is certainly entitled, the sentiment plainly originated in a regard to its real and practical utility. Such, indeed, is the fixed and sublime idea with which the imagination is often happily impressed of its transcendent excellence; that it is in fact generally practised by the best and wisest of mankind, without any view to an ultimate end, but merely from the conscious satisfaction and delight which it excites in minds habitually and uniformly virtuous. And thus we are by a very natural and pardonable error, an error originating in an ardent love and admiration of virtue, led to exalt the means above the end: and reduced to the intolerable absurdity of maintaining that situations and circumstances might actually arise, which would impose upon the whole race of mankind the fatal obligation, which would really and truly make it their indispensable duty, by an in-

flexible perseverance in that line of conduct which is supposed consonant to the abstract relations of things, to render themselves for ever miserable.*

But in opposition to the system of morals founded upon utility, it is alleged, “ that those who assert virtue to be in its own nature of subordinate rank and importance, who deem it valuable only as a means promotive of a certain end, and who consequently scruple not to vary the means in order to accomplish the end, virtually maintain, that the words right and just stand for no real and distinct characters of actions, but signify merely qualities conducive to happiness: so that the very same actions may be at different

* Quæro si duo sint, quorum alter optimus vir, æquissimus, summa justitia, singulari fide, alter insigni scelere et audacia; et si in eo sit errore civitas, ut bonum illum virum sceleratum, facinorosum, nefarium putet: contra autem qui sit improbissimus, existimet esse summa probitate ac fide: proque hac opinione omnium civium, bonus ille vir vexetur, rapiatur, manus ei denique auferantur, effodiantur oculi, damnetur, vinciat, uratur, exterminetur, egeat; possemò, jure etiam optimo omnibus miserrimus esse videatur; contra autem ille improbus, laudetur, colatur, ab omnibus diligatur, omnes ad eum honores, omnia imperia, omnes opes, omnes denique copię conferantur, vir denique optimus omnium asimulatione, et dignissimus omni fortuna judicetur: quis tandem erit tam demens qui dubitet utrum se esse malit?

CICERO de Republ. lib. 3.

times

times and in different circumstances, both right and wrong, good and evil; and the most pernicious and horrible crimes will be transformed into virtues, if but the most trifling balance of happiness may be supposed to result from them." To this objection it is obvious to reply, that the moral worth and excellence of every action consists in the motive from which it proceeds, and the effect which it is calculated to produce. All actions are right and just which are intended and calculated to promote the general happiness, even though that end should be effected by a deviation from those established maxims of morality, by which, in the usual course of things, the general happiness is best secured and protected. And this leads to a second objection, deduced from the imminent and alarming dangers to be apprehended from the abuse or misapplication of this theory. "If the rule of right be public expediency, and if every man be entitled to consider himself as a judge of this expediency, and consequently empowered to dispense with the most sacred and fundamental laws of virtue and morality at his pleasure; what dire and fatal effects may be expected to ensue! We are expressly commanded by the highest authority not to do evil that good may come; but the theory which founds morality upon utility is utterly sub-

versive of this maxim. It teaches us that it is right and proper to do evil that good may come. But if men once suffer themselves to indulge this dangerous and unwarrantable licence; if they rashly and impiously presume to create exceptions to divine prohibitions, there is an end of all morality; and the obligation of every duty may at one time or other be superseded through the suggestions of ignorance or of interest; the caprice of fashion, or the frenzy of fanaticism." This argument carries with it such apparent authority and force of conviction, that some philosophers, who, adopting the general theory of Mr. Hume, estimate virtue in exact proportion to its power of producing happiness, positively disclaim any right or privilege of dispensing, in any case whatever, with the established rules of morality; rules which have the sanction, not only of human but of divine authority. "For the consequences of human actions," as Dr. Johnson, to quote one of the most respectable of this class of ethical writers, observes, "being sometimes uncertain and sometimes remote, it is not possible in many cases for most men, nor in all cases for any man to determine what actions will ultimately produce happiness: and therefore it is proper that a rule should be authoritatively laid down, to be followed invariably in opposition to appearances, and in every

every change of circumstances, by which we may be certain to promote the general felicity, and be set free from the dangerous temptation of doing evil that good may come." Others, however, hesitate not to maintain, that there are extraordinary cases which manifestly require and fully justify a deviation from the ordinary rules of conduct: that God commands obedience and submission to the moral law, only as it is the means of promoting the general good: and if it can be proved upon demonstrative or highly probable grounds, that this end might in any instance be better and more effectually attained by departing from, than by strictly conforming to the common and ordinary rules of conduct, then we ought to judge this departure consonant to the divine will, notwithstanding the apostolical caution not to do evil that good may come, the wisdom and propriety of which as a general maxim no one can dispute. "Moral philosophy," says Archdeacon Paley, "cannot pronounce that any rule of morality is so rigid as to bend to no exceptions: nor, on the other hand, can she comprize these exceptions within any previous description. She confesses, that the obligation of every law depends upon its ultimate utility; that this utility having a finite and determinate value, situations may be feigned, and consequently may arise,

arise, in which the general tendency is outweighed by the enormity of the particular mischief."

Shall we then, some perhaps will say, admit the Jesuitical maxim to be at last founded on truth, which has been so long exploded as no less false than pernicious, viz. *that the end justifies the means*? Did not the disciples of Loyola pretend to vindicate by this maxim every species of extravagance and depravity? True. But the extravagance was not chargeable upon the maxim itself, but upon their abominable perversion and misapplication of it. Although cases may be supposed in which deviations from the established rules of morality must be admitted as justifiable, reason and even common sense will teach us the necessary distinctions; and while Brutus is admired and applauded, Ravalliac remains the object of abhorrence and execration. Any deviation from the laws of morality, which is always in itself an evil, must indeed be attended in every instance with a clear and evident preponderance of good, in order to its vindication. In the concerns of public life, and where the happiness of nations is depending, deviations from established rules will doubtless be most likely to occur, political and moral rectitude being never really at variance. Who will dispute that obedience to the civil magistrate is to be classed amongst the chief duties
of

of morality? and it is required of us in scripture in terms as exprefs and unqualified as any other. But it may be affumed without danger of contradiction, that the Revolution was not merely an allowable, but an highly laudable deviation from the general rule of duty. Justice is perhaps, of all the eftablifhed laws of morality, that which we are accuftomed to regard as moft momentous and inviolable. But would the moft scrupulous moralift hesitate to affift in the demolition of a houfe, the property of another, if abfolutely neceffary to flop the progrefs of a conflagration? Or would he condemn the mafter of a commercial vefel as criminal, who in the extremity of a ftorm fhould confign the bales of merchandize which it contained to the bofom of the deep, without or even againft the confent of the owners? What more facred than truth? But who would not deem a falfehood meritorious, if it were the means of preventing the perpetration of a murder?

It is in vain to allege that this principle is liable to perversion and abufe; for what fyftem of morals is not expofed to the fame objection? Every other rule, when reforted to as a principle of action, is equally difficult to develope and explain, and equally liable to miftake and abufe in the application, as experience fufficiently and indeed incontrovertibly proves. That virtue confifts folety in an unintermitted exertion

tion of our talents in the advancement of the general welfare and happiness, is the noblest lesson that man can be taught; and if universally received and acted upon, it must, when connected with even very moderate attainments in knowledge, be productive of the most salutary effects. And if this generous and benevolent principle will not restrain men from degrading themselves to savages and barbarians; if this sovereign balm be not of efficacy to assuage the malignity of superstition or the fury of fanaticism, to what purpose can it be to urge to them that virtue consists in obedience to the divine will, or in a conformity to the fitness of things, to the abstract law of reason, or the eternal rule of rectitude? If those blind and furious zealots whom you thus address should happen by a rare chance to possess patience to hearken, and understanding to comprehend your discourse, they will undoubtedly tell you in return, that they have been solely and conscientiously guided by these just and excellent principles—that the massacre of St. Bartholomew, for example, was concerted in humble resignation and submission to the divine will—the gunpowder treason was a transaction conformable to the fitness of things—the burning of John Huss and Jerome of Prague by the council of Constance, in contempt of the safe-conduct previously granted to them, was
authorized

authorized by the abstract law of reason, and the assassination of Henry the Great by Raviliac was agreeable to the eternal rule of rectitude. If you attempt to convince them that these execrable actions were really contrary to the will of God, the rule of rectitude, &c. how is this to be effected but by demonstrating them to be inconsistent with the first principles of morality; or, in other words, to be subversive of the very foundations of human safety and happiness, *i. e.* contradictory to the great law of general utility? *This is the ultimate test*; and though it is certainly possible, that if the perpetrators of these villanies had adopted this principle as the true basis of virtue, they might have acted precisely in the same manner; yet, by resorting to it as the criterion of moral rectitude or of the divine will, you admit the coincidence of those principles with that of utility, and virtually acknowledge it to be a rule of action much more level to human sagacity and comprehension.

Upon the whole, it follows, therefore, that universal benevolence, under a right direction, constitutes the very essence of virtue; for universal benevolence aims at the advancement of universal happiness, or, in other words, of general utility, as its sole object. There is, however, another, though inferior sense, in which the

the term virtue is frequently used, in order to denote those moral qualities which are more immediately useful to ourselves; such as temperance, patience, vigilance, fortitude, constancy, &c. qualities highly estimable and important, and which may all be included in the general term PRUDENCE; and into prudence, and not benevolence, virtue has, by some philosophers, been ultimately resolved. This is, however, when the terms are explained, a mere verbal contention. Benevolence and prudence conjoined form the perfection of morality; but if they are to be considered as in a state of opposition or separation, benevolence must be acknowledged a more perfect rule of conduct than prudence, because it is calculated to produce a greater ultimate sum of happiness. Benevolence is therefore virtue in the highest and most appropriate sense. But it cannot be denied, that benevolence, though the most perfect and excellent rule of life and conduct, as it respects the whole, is far from being so to each and every individual of whom this mighty whole is composed. It will not be easy to point out any theory of morals, founded on the basis of *prudence*, more worthy of observation than the system which is exhibited in that celebrated production of human wisdom, the Book of PROVERBS. All the prospects, hopes, and fears of the royal preacher and moralist appear to terminate in the present life; and his

his arguments and exhortations are inviolably founded upon an hypothesis which was probably consonant to the general opinion of the age and country in which he lived. In that lofty and sublime address to the Deity which he offered up at the consecration of the Temple, not the most distant hint is to be found relative to a future state of existence. The blessings which he implores, and the judgments which he deprecates, are all of a temporal nature. Nor does the Jewish monarch, in any of his works, attempt to enforce the practice of his system of morals by any of the sanctions of religion. The royal philosopher, drawing towards the conclusion of a long life passed in the unintermitted pursuit of every variety of sensitive and intellectual enjoyment, seems to have contracted, from a satiety of pleasure, a certain tincture of melancholy too nearly approaching the morose and cheerless morality of the cloister. He seems to place man's supreme good in a kind of stoical apathy, a proud and contemptuous indifference to the world, and abstraction from it. And, far from urging the doctrine of a future state as an incentive to virtuous exertion, he expressly asserts, "that there is one event unto all; that the dead know not any thing; that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave." We find, indeed, the declaration,

"that

“ that the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto GOD, who gave it ;” but it is evident, that in using this language the Jewish monarch had a direct reference to the Mosaic account of the creation of man ; in which it is related, that man, *i. e.* the corporeal part of man was formed of the dust of the earth ; and that the Almighty breathed into him the breath of life, so that he became a living soul or spirit. At death, therefore, the dust would, in the natural course of things, return to the earth again ; and the spirit, or *breath*, for it is the same word, נֶפֶשׁ, which is thus variously translated, unto GOD, who gave it. Which expression no more implies the separate existence of the spirit subsequent to death, than the Mosaic account implies its separate existence previous to its union with the corporeal organized system. And the general ideas both of Moses and Solomon are clearly consonant to the Oriental or Indian philosophy, which affirmed the soul, or mental principle, to be an emanation from the divine mind, or source of intellect, into which, at death, it was again absorbed ; losing all separate consciousness, though not by any positive act extinguished or annihilated. “ Vulgo putant hisce verbis,” says M. Le Clerc, animadverting upon this passage, “ Salomonem fatis ostendere ꝑ se creditam immortalitatem animi. Sed mirum esset, si ita res haberet,

haberet, antea dubitationem hac de re a Salomone perspicuè propositam, et quidem sæpius.—Cap. III. 19. Ed. seq. IX. 2, 5, 10. Verbulo uno et altero, quasi metueret ne res intelligeretur solutam; cum nulla res sit majoris momenti, neque sæpius inculcanda immortalitate animi. Atqui, ut corpus reversum in terram desinit esse corpus humanum, et dissolvitur; ita spiritus rediens ad Deum, eam pati mutationem, credere potuit Salomo, quâ desinebat esse spiritus humanus.”

The Jewish monarch also assures us, “that God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” But that any thing more is here intended than temporal judgments, or the judicial dispensations of Providence in the present life, it is incumbent upon those who assert to prove. For to deviate from the usual acceptance of any term without reason, or without any other reason than to furnish an argument in favor of an hypothesis destitute of any other argument, must be acknowledged the height of critical temerity.

Presuming, therefore, that the royal moralist considered it as an undoubted fact, that man did not survive the grave, it will be easy to discern how well his metaphysical and ethical theories correspond. The characteristic defect of that

system of ethics which has descended to us from this royal philosopher, and which abounds with admirable sagacity of sentiment, as well as beauty of language, is the want of a principle of genuine catholicism. There is no glow of sympathy, no ardor of beneficence. It is, in a word, when compared with the divine philanthropy of the gospel, a cold, an artful, and a selfish system. Solomon professes, indeed, that his design is to give subtilty to the simple; and this object it is, undoubtedly, well calculated to accomplish. "Who so hearkeneth unto me," says he, "shall dwell safely.—Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee. Honor the Lord with thy substance, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty. Wisdom is the principal thing. Exalt her and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honor when thou dost embrace her. My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth," &c. It is not, therefore, without good ground that, upon this system, he makes wisdom to boast, "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence." In the usual tenor of his reasonings, the arguments by which he endeavours to deter men from the practice of vice are merely of a prudential nature: and a fixed abhorrence of vice, from the consideration of its innate depravity, and of the fatal tendency of moral evil, as
utterly

utterly subversive of the general happiness and order of society, he neither seems to have attained himself, nor to have wished to inspire into the minds of those for whom these lessons of wisdom were designed. The approbation of the Deity he represents, indeed, as uniformly annexed to a virtuous conduct; but this approbation displays itself, agreeably to his general system, in no other mode than by annexing, in the usual course of his providence, honor and happiness to virtue, shame and misery to vice. “He that followeth after righteousness and mercy, findeth life, righteousness, and honor.—God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness; and there shall be no reward for the evil man,” &c. If any one, however, should doubt of the perfect conformity of events in the present life to this abstract theory, it is too evident that it is incapable of supplying him with higher or nobler motives to persevere in a course of virtuous action. And this leads to a few concluding remarks on the nature and extent of moral obligation.

To the grand and interesting question, what obligation are we under to adhere, in all circumstances, and under all disadvantages, to the practice of virtue? the advocates for the system of RECTITUDE think it sufficient to say, that we feel the force of the obligation, though we cannot

explain the nature of it. It is an obligation universal in its extent, perpetual in its duration, and absolute in its sovereignty. The sanctions of religion do not constitute this obligation, they merely enforce it. And if those sanctions were entirely abrogated, or if it were possible to suppose them no longer the sanctions of virtue, but of vice, still the obligation to the practice of virtue would remain in full force; for obligation is involved in the very nature of it, and the eternal distinction of moral right and wrong is the true and sole foundation of moral obligation; right and obligation being manifestly correlative terms.

But this account of moral obligation seems much too sublime for human comprehension. All is wrapt in mysterious and impenetrable obscurity.—

“ We see before us neither here nor here,
 “ Nor what ensues; but have a fog in ken
 “ That we cannot look thro’.

SHAKESPEAR.

To the advocates of the opposite hypothesis, then, we are compelled to resort for a more satisfactory and intelligent solution. Moral obligation, according to this class of philosophers, is but another term for rational inducement. If the question, therefore, be proposed to them, what obligation are we under to be virtuous, or
 to

to adopt those principles of action which are most likely to promote the general happiness; they reply, without hesitation, that your own happiness is closely connected, by a thousand ties, with the general happiness; and that a regard to your own true interest is the strongest of all obligations, or, in other words, the most forcible, as well as rational, of all motives. But if a very curious enquirer should farther presume to ask of a metaphysician of this class, whether the interest of the individual was invariably, inseparably, and universally connected with the general interest of mankind? this is a question which might well be supposed "to give him pause." A moralist whose sole or principal object was reputation, would probably decline to give an explicit answer to this obnoxious enquiry; and content himself with acknowledging, "that it would be a little difficult to find any which will, to the understanding, when divested of the feelings of virtue, appear satisfactory and convincing*." But a philosopher of a candid mind, who has only truth in view, would ingenuously confess, that private interest does not, and cannot, in all cases, coincide with the public good. Then, in certain cases, the obligation to be virtuous ceases! True; but in those cases religion must be called

* Hume's Essays, Vol. II. p. 306.

to the aid of virtue. Religion completes and perfects the coincidence between private and social happiness; for it teaches us, that whatever sacrifices are made by the individual of private to public good, will receive a glorious compensation in a future and eternal state of existence. But does natural religion inculcate this sublime doctrine with clearness and certainty? Far from it. Natural religion only affords a faint gleam of hope that this may possibly be the case. Revelation, then, must be ultimately invoked, to supply the manifest defects and imperfections of the religion of nature. And revelation, such as Christianity offers to the acceptance of mankind, a revelation whose grand object it is to ascertain this truth, crowns the whole fabric. And thus we are led to conceive of Christianity as the keystone of that wide extended arch which human virtue, solicitous to form a permanent and solid basis of human happiness, began to build; but which, unassisted by superior and divine aid, she is compelled to acknowledge her inability to finish.

ESSAY XII.

ON MATERIALISM.

A JUSTLY celebrated Christian divine and philosopher has excited the attention of the learned world in general, and the astonishment and indignation of a great part of it, by the publication of a treatise, written in defence of the system of Materialism; in which he attempts to prove, contrary to the opinions which have been almost universally prevalent in the Christian church for a long succession of ages, that man does not consist of two substances, essentially different from each other; but that the conscious principle, or what we generally term the soul, is merely a property resulting from such an organical structure as that of the brain. It follows, as an immediate and necessary consequence from this hypothesis, that the idea of the natural immortality of the soul is wholly fallacious, as the properties of thought and sensation must, of course, be extinguished at the dissolution of that system of organized matter to which they appertain. This opinion has long been considered as a tenet peculiar to infidelity; and Materialism has

been held in almost as much abhorrence by the generality of Christians as Atheism itself. The arguments of so able a writer as Dr. Priestley must, however, be entitled to a deliberate and impartial examination; and when we know that so learned a divine, and so acute a metaphysician, does not deem the system of Materialism inconsistent with the belief and profession of Christianity, it should incline us to abate somewhat of our prejudice against this obnoxious opinion, and to exercise that candor of investigation which we should, perhaps, be apt to discard as too nearly allied to criminal indifference for religion, when controverting the supposed heresies of Spinoza, Hobbes, or Collins.

In this Essay it is proposed to exhibit a general view, both of the popular and unpopular hypotheses relative to this subject, and of the arguments by which they are severally supported. And first, the Immaterialists urge, as a proof equally clear, concise, and conclusive, as a proof nothing short of demonstration, of the essential difference between matter and spirit; that the principle of perception, or consciousness, being in its own nature a simple, unextended and indivisible power, must inhere in a simple, unextended and indivisible substance; whereas, the properties of solidity and extension are absolutely essential to matter, which is therefore necessarily

cessarily a discernible substance, consisting of separable, nay, of actually separate and distinct parts. And, as the whole can contain nothing more than the sum or aggregate of the powers or qualities inherent in all its parts, a system of matter, however exquisite its structure or organization, cannot be possessed of consciousness or perception, unless consciousness be supposed an inherent property of matter. And upon this hypothesis, if matter be infinitely divisible, consciousness must likewise be infinitely divisible, which is a gross absurdity. Or if matter be ultimately reducible to indivisible particles, each particle must possess a certain degree of perception, and then the simple and individual power of perception belonging to a system of matter, such as the brain, must consist of a multitude of distinct and separate perceptions belonging to its several component particles, which is a palpable contradiction. It is evident then, to a demonstration, that the principle of perception is an immaterial principle; and if an immaterial, an immortal principle; for a principle which has, as far as we can perceive, no properties in common with matter, cannot, without a manifest absurdity, be supposed affected, much less annihilated by the dissolution of that material system, to which it is, by divine power, for a certain period united. Death, in fact, is nothing more than the separation

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tion of soul and body ; and when disincumbered from this gross material vehicle, the immortal spirit will doubtless take its flight into the regions of empyreum, emancipated from every species of disorder and indisposition derived from the contagion of flesh and blood.

Exclusive, however, of this grand and demonstrative argument in favor of the system of Immaterialism, there are various considerations which should induce us to believe, that matter and spirit are substances essentially distinct from each other, and that the conscious principle does not depend upon any organical material system for its existence or support. The immortality and consequent immateriality of the soul may be strongly argued from the almost universal assent of mankind, and from "that eager hope, that fond desire, that longing after immortality," accompanied with "that inward dread and secret horror of falling into nought," which operates so powerfully throughout the rational creation, and from which the inferior orders of animal beings are wholly exempt. Why should our omnipotent and beneficent Creator implant in our minds these delusive hopes? Why should he excite desires which are never to be satisfied? Why hold out to our view a prospect of happiness, to which we can never attain? Do not our minds revolt at the idea, that a mode of conduct so arbitrary

bitrary and capricious can be adopted by a Being infinite in wisdom and goodness? Surely we shall not dare to ascribe principles of government and action to the Deity, by which we should think even humanity degraded!

But it may be farther urged, that man is plainly in his own nature an accountable creature; he is endowed with powers and faculties of a very exalted kind. These powers he is equally capable of applying to the best and to the worst purposes. By the proper use and application of them he may attain to the love and practice of every virtue; and by the neglect and abuse of them, he will certainly sink into the lowest abysses of vice and depravity. Can it be imagined, then, that the great Being who gave us reason and understanding, that we might know how to refuse the evil and chuse the good; who gave us freedom of agency, in order to enable us to make that choice; who gave us conscience, to serve as a perpetual monitor within our breasts, pointing out our duty to us, exhorting us to the strict performance of it, and silently warning us of the danger of acting contrary to its dictates—Can it be imagined that he will permit these noble faculties to be abused, these warnings to be despised, and these obvious designs of his providence to be counteracted with impunity? “If there is a God, he must delight in virtue, and that
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which he delights in must be happy." And, as happiness is not an invariable concomitant of virtue, nor misery of vice, in this life, it is certain that a future day of retribution must arrive : and the immortality of the soul is a doctrine, without which it is not possible to establish the rectitude of the divine nature, or the justice of the divine government, upon a solid or satisfactory foundation.

AGAIN, if we make an appeal to fact and experience, we shall find the result equally conclusive in favour of the immaterial, and consequently the immortal nature of the soul's essence. Every man, by reflecting upon the operations of his own mind, may easily be convinced that the conscious principle is something totally different from that corporeal frame in which it resides ; and which, being itself inert, must receive life and animation from this intimate and mysterious union. It is as impossible, strictly and philosophically speaking, that perception should be a property of the brain, however exquisite its organical structure, as that the most irregular and fortuitous combination of the same impercipient particles should possess this power. And though it must be allowed that the brain is in some inexplicable manner instrumental to thought, as the eye is to vision, or the ear to hearing, yet the faculty of perception, and the organ by means
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of which that faculty is actually exerted, surely ought not to be confounded. When the eye happens to be closed, or when it is enveloped in darkness, the soul certainly has not lost its *faculty* of seeing, though, by a temporary obstruction, the exercise of that faculty may for a short space be suspended; and when the mental powers seem to be injured and impaired, through age or disease, it is not that the immaterial, immortal substance is in any respect changed or capable of change: these symptoms of decay can only be occasioned by the partial derangement of that material system, which must at last suffer a total dissolution. “And when the soul, or conscious principle, is separated from the body by death, it will then be bare to the immediate impression of objects, and the hand which feels an object at the end of a staff, may certainly be allowed to feel the same much better by immediate contact.” *

LASTLY, It is urged by Christian Immaterialists that the sacred scriptures, in a variety of passages, expressly assert the separate existence of the soul, and clearly and plainly inculcate the doctrine of its natural immortality; a doctrine which was almost universally received by the learned amongst the Jews, at the period of Christ's

* Wollaston's Religion of Nature, Sec. IX. § VII.

incarnation, as well as by that part of the heathen world which embraced the Platonic system of philosophy; a system which at that period, and for many ages afterwards, was distinguished by its prevalence and popularity, no less than its intrinsic excellence; and in this point, at least, its perfect consonance to the dictates of right reason confirmed by the express declarations of the Christian revelation.

The ADVOCATES for MATERIALISM, on the other hand, profess to hold these and the like arguments in sovereign contempt, and endeavor to establish their own hypothesis by reasons which appear to them of a much more obvious and convincing nature. The arguments urged by our opponents, say they, are deduced either from metaphysical considerations relating to the essence and properties of matter and spirit, or from the moral attributes of the Deity discoverable by the light of nature, or from the express declarations of the sacred scriptures. As to the pretended metaphysical demonstration of the essential difference between matter and spirit, founded upon the unity of consciousness belonging to the one, and the discernibility characteristic of the other, nothing can be more weak and inconclusive. For if we suppose, and all appearances lead us to suppose, this unity of consciousness to result from a peculiar system of organization, it is evident

dent that the matter, of which the organized system is composed, being deranged or separated, the power of perception, though not capable of division, will cease or become extinct. That perception should result from any composition or combination of impercipient particles must, indeed, be acknowledged to bear the appearance of a difficulty; but it is a difficulty by no means insuperable, when we recollect that, in almost innumerable instances, complete systems, or integral combinations of matter, possess properties entirely different from those which appertain to its several component parts. Sphericity, for instance, is a property belonging to a complete globe, of which the component particles are entirely destitute. The most common piece of mechanism, a watch, a harpsichord, or a telescope, must also be allowed to possess powers resulting from the skilful arrangement of the several parts specifically different from those which inhere in the parts themselves. And shall we venture, blind and ignorant as we are, to affirm that the Divine Artificer cannot so arrange and organize those material particles, which compose the human frame, as to produce a system which shall possess properties different from those which inhere in each distinct particle? If, however, this should rashly, not to say impiously, be pronounced impossible, and the principle of perception

tion should be deemed a substance essentially different from matter, and super-added by the divine power to the organized system, unless we wish to amuse ourselves with words destitute of real meaning, we shall soon be convinced how little advantage the Immaterialists can derive from this concession. To the term substance, we can affix no other idea than that it is the unknown support of certain known properties. If this definition conveys any meaning, it is certainly extremely dark and obscure: and who can pretend to be so intimately acquainted with the arcanæ of nature, as to be able to demonstrate that the substance by which the property of perception is at present supported will be adequate to its support, when disunited from that material system by the instrumentality of which every act of perception is exerted.

It is well known that all our ideas and perceptions are derived from the impressions made on the brain by the different organs of sense: and though the abstract power or principle of perception should be supposed to remain after the final dissolution of the corporeal system, it is a power which cannot be proved to exist by any effect, the different organs of sense being indispensably necessary to the exertion of this power. It must therefore remain dormant and inactive till it is again united to a material vehicle; and this is in
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fact the opinion, however wild and fanciful it may seem, of those Christians who, styling themselves Immaterialists, maintain a suspension of consciousness in the interval between death and the resurrection. But if we exclude the idea of a resurrection, it may be asked, what is the difference between such a state of unconsciousness and absolute annihilation? The material organized system is dissolved; perception has totally ceased; and nothing remains but the immaterial substance or the unknown support of a non-existing property. A man must surely have a strange attachment to particular terms and phrases, who can satisfy himself with such an unintelligible salvo as this, in order to pass for an Immaterialist. How much more consistent and candid would it be to acknowledge, without reserve, that man is of an uniform composition, and that perception is the property or result of such an organical structure as that of the brain? Indeed it is highly unphilosophical, and a mere arbitrary supposition, to maintain the existence of two principles essentially different in the same being, if all the properties of this individual being can inhere in the same substance. And where is the inconsistency of supposing perception compatible with extension and solidity? It is impossible, indeed, for us to explain how perception results from a material substance; but is

it not equally impossible to form any conjecture how it results from an immaterial substance? It is sufficient to ascertain the fact, and the fact is sufficiently ascertained—"I see a man move and hear him speak; from his speech I certainly infer that he thinks as I do. I see then that man is a being who thinks and acts. After some time the man falls down in my sight, grows cold and stiff—He speaks and acts no more. Is it not then reasonable to conclude, that he thinks no more? As the only reason that I had to believe that he did think was his motion and speech, so now that this motion and speech cease, I have lost the only way of proving that he had a power of thought. Whence can I infer that the man consists of two parts, and that the inward part continues to live and think when the outward part ceases to live and move. His motion and thought die together as far as I can discern." *

As to the argument drawn from internal feeling, and from the supposed consciousness in every man, that the principle of perception is a substance essentially different from matter, and not a mere property of matter, it is almost too futile for notice. All that any man can possibly be conscious of, by reflecting upon the operations of his own mind, is that he is possessed of the *power of*

* Hallet's Disc. p. 213.

perception. But whether this power resides in a divisible or indivisible, a material or immaterial substance, must be determined, if it can be determined at all, by reasoning. And those facts upon which our reasonings must be founded, are obviously contrary to any such conclusion. To affirm, that perception cannot arise from, or be super-added, as an adventitious property, to any organical system of matter, is to begin and end a controversy by begging the question. If the immaterial substance in which perception resides has, as the generality of Immaterialists assert, no properties in common with matter, how is it possible for the two substances mutually to act and re-act upon each other? A substance destitute of properties, is a mere name; and two substances, possessed of properties specifically different, no more exist, with relation to each other, than if they were entirely destitute of properties. This is a difficulty of such magnitude, that the celebrated Dr. Clarke, and others, have allowed expansion to be a property common to both. And indeed it seems self evident, that whatever exists must exist somewhere, or in some part of infinite space, and must occupy some portion of space, *i. e.* must have figure and extension. But if the immaterial substance of the soul has figure and extension, what becomes of the argument drawn from the indiscerpibility of the

thinking substance? Whatever is possessed of finite extension must, in its own nature, be capable of division; and perception, though in itself a property incapable of division, if admitted to be the property of a substance capable of division, may certainly be deemed the property of a material, as consistently as of an immaterial substance; for though matter be possessed of solidity as well as extension, he must be an able metaphysician indeed who can demonstrate that extension is and solidity is not compatible with perception. Not to mention that what is generally stiled solidity, or impenetrability, may really be nothing more than a power of repulsion; that power alone being fully adequate to the solution of all the phænomena relative to matter usually ascribed to solidity. But enough has been urged to expose the weakness and vanity of this pretended demonstration, which places the natural immortality of a man precisely upon the same foundation with the natural immortality of "the poor beetle that we tread upon," which is equally endowed with the power of perception, and which, as the great poet remarks,

" In corporal sufferance feels a pang as great
As when a giant dies."

But there are other arguments, deduced from the consideration of the moral attributes of God,
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which are represented as decisive proofs of the immortality and consequent immateriality of the soul. And to these arguments, certainly, every man, who wishes to promote the best interests of mankind, would willingly allow all the weight and force of which they are in their own nature capable. It is, however, highly unbecoming a philosopher and lover of truth, to feign a conviction which he does not feel; and it must not be disguised, that these arguments so favorable to natural religion, but which seem in a great measure to supersede the necessity of a divine revelation, are a very frail foundation to build our hopes of immortality upon. Reason assures us of nothing farther concerning the natural or moral attributes of the Deity than can be deduced from the phænomena of nature. From these we may certainly infer, the eternal existence of a first cause of infinite power and wisdom. But of the infinite goodness of this great Being, though benevolence evidently predominates in the works of creation, the proof is by no means so decisive. Justice, holiness, truth, rectitude, &c. as applied to the Deity, are only modifications of goodness. And it is asserted, on the one side, and admitted on the other, that these attributes cannot be fully vindicated but upon the supposition of a future state of retribution, which implies the doctrine of the soul's immortality: true it

is, that the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul may with very good effect be applied to the vindication of the moral attributes of God; and on the other hand, the moral attributes of God may be applied with equal success to prove the doctrine of the soul's immortality. There is indeed this perplexing circumstance attending the proof of each, that you must suppose the truth of the one in order to demonstrate the truth of the other. It is evidently arguing in a circle, to say, that the absolute perfection of the divine justice and goodness proves the doctrine of the soul's immortality, and that the doctrine of the soul's immortality proves the perfection of God's justice and goodness. This is the insuperable dilemma which makes a divine revelation so peculiarly necessary and so highly valuable. Christianity informs us, that though a suspension of consciousness will take place upon a dissolution of the present material system, a day will arrive when God will illustriously display his power, by restoring that organical system upon which thought and perception depend; and in that day he will himself vindicate his own attributes by judging the world in righteousness. The resurrection is that great event which Christ came into the world to promulgate; and which he died and rose again to establish by the most indubitable evidence. The momentous language of scrip-
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ture is, “that the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, and that this mortal shall then, and not till then, put on immortality.” But this can never be justly urged in proof of the natural immateriality of the percipient principle. For supposing thought and perception originally and necessarily to result from material organization, the restoration of the organical system, though it had been dissolved ten thousand ages, must also be accompanied with a restoration of the powers of thought and sensation. By restoring the former arrangement, thought and sensation would return as necessarily and mechanically as shape and figure would return. If, however, perception be supposed a quality not inherent in matter, but super-added to it by divine power, doubtless, the same power which originally produced could re-produce, and annex the same consciousness to the same system at his pleasure. We see, in fact, that perception may be totally suspended and afterwards restored; as in the case of trances, deliquium, suffocation, &c. But surely it is as easy to almighty power to restore a suspended animation and consciousness, after the lapse of a thousand years as of one day or one moment. If the thing itself be not impossible, it is absurd to suppose that the length or shortness of the interval can either create or remove any real difficulty.

ESSAY XIII.

ON IMMATERIALISM.

THERE are few controversies which do not hinge upon some grand and leading point. This is remarkably the case in the celebrated metaphysical question respecting the material or immaterial nature of the percipient principle in man. The absolute incompatibility of perception with the known and acknowledged properties of the material substance, has been illustrated by Dr. Clarke, in his successive replies to Mr. Collins, with such transcendent ability, that little has been left for succeeding writers on the same side, than to repeat the same arguments in different language. In opposition to this hypothesis, Dr. Priestley, who has revived and defended the system of Materialism with a great display of genius and learning, states it as a primary axiom, “that the power of sensation or perception never having been found but in conjunction with a certain organized system of matter, we ought, as philosophers, to conclude that this power necessarily exists in and results from that organized system, *unless* it can be shewn to be incompatible with

with other known properties of the same substance." This no fair and ingenuous reasoner will deny. On the other hand, it must be admitted, that constant conjunction implies necessary connection only, when reasons cannot be discovered to prove the conjunction to be accidental and arbitrary. And the allegation upon which the merits of the question, therefore, rests, is, that discernibility is a property of matter absolutely incompatible with the property of sensation or perception; or, in other words, that sensation is a power or property incapable of division. But as the power of the entire system is clearly nothing more than the sum or aggregate of the powers of all the parts, it necessarily follows, that the primary particles of which the system is composed must, upon the material hypothesis, possess distinct powers of sensation; and that these powers combined constitute the indivisible power of sensation belonging to the system: or, in other words, that the indivisible power of sensation is a divisible power; nay, an infinitely divisible power, if matter be, as philosophers in general allow, an infinitely divisible substance. We are then compelled, by this *reductio ad absurdum*, to acknowledge that sensation or perception is not the property of a material substance; *i. e.* if the common mode of expression be retained, it is the property of an immaterial substance;

stance; or, to avoid verbal contention, it is a property not resulting from, or necessarily connected with the organical system, but a property wholly foreign, super-induced, and adventitious.

In opposition to this reasoning, the Materialists affirm, that entire systems may possess, and they think themselves warranted to pronounce, that organized systems of matter actually do possess powers essentially different from those which inhere in the several parts. Amongst various familiar, though striking illustrations of this truth, it has been said that a rose possesses the property of sweetness or fragrance; a globe the property of sphericity; a harpsichord the property or power of producing harmony; *aqua regia* the property of dissolving gold, &c. &c. though the component particles of these different organized systems are themselves totally destitute of the powers and properties here enumerated.

The Immaterialists, in reply, assert that it is not only false in fact, but a direct contradiction, and an absolute impossibility in the nature of things, that a system should possess any property which does not inhere in the component parts. To assert that the power of the whole is the sum or aggregate of the powers of all the parts, is an identical and self-evident proposition; the whole, and all the parts, being terms precisely synonymous. Whoever, therefore, calls in question the
truth

truth of this axiom, must maintain that the power of the whole is something different from the power of all the parts; *i. e.* that the power of the whole is not the power of the whole. It will be easy to demonstrate the correspondence of facts with this plain and simple theory. For this purpose it is necessary to observe, that the properties of matter, or what are generally denominated such, may be divided into real and nominal. Figure, magnitude, and motion, are qualities really inherent in matter; but figure, magnitude, and motion, eternally varied, can produce only different combinations of figure, magnitude, and motion. There are also powers or qualities vulgarly considered as inherent properties of matter organically disposed, which are really and truly qualities or affections of the mental and percipient principle. Thus the sweetness or fragrance of the rose, considered as a quality of the rose, can mean nothing more than a certain arrangement, configuration, and motion of parts, which, in some inexplicable manner, produces the sensation of sweetness. In this instance, therefore, the power of the whole is plainly the aggregate of the powers residing in the parts, by the motion and organization of which a certain effect is produced upon a foreign and percipient substance. And to represent the power of exciting the sensation of sweetness or fragrance,

fragrance, which sensation is a property or affection of that percipient substance, as a power specifically different from the powers inhering in the particles of the flower, is just as absurd as it would be to represent the power of exciting the sensation of pain, which the thorn upon the rose possesses, as a power specifically distinct, and resulting from, but not inhering in the several parts of which it is composed. But a globe, we are told, possesses the property of sphericity, though not a single particle amongst that infinite number of which the globe is constituted is itself of a spherical form. The fallacy of this illustration is, however, as easily demonstrable as of the former. The sphericity of a globe is evidently the sum or aggregate of the curvilinear or convex parts which compose its surface; and the property of the whole is neither more nor less than the combined properties of all its parts. No one doubts, that by new compositions or arrangements of material particles, possessing magnitude, figure, and motion, an endless diversity of phænomena may be produced, to which new terms will or may be applied. New names, however, certainly do not constitute new properties; and though we give to a globe the appellation of an entire system, and ascribe to it the property of sphericity, we know, at the same time, that it is really nothing more than a collection

lection of thousands or millions of particles, actually separate and distinct, arranged in that particular form which we denominate spherical. But this can never be regarded as in the remotest manner analogous to the *creation* of the power of perception, in consequence of a certain organical arrangement or disposition of impercipient particles. Sphericity is the property of the entire sphere; but every part of the sphere, if divided, possesses its share of sphericity. But if the percipient principle is divided, what becomes of the property of perception? A sphere equally divided becomes two hemispheres: does a perception, when divided in like manner, become two demi-perceptions? The same reasonings may easily be transferred and applied to the harpsichord. Can any one be absurd enough to affirm that the power of harmony resides in the harpsichord, as the power of perception does in the mind. After the utmost skill of the artificer has been exerted, we discover nothing more than new modifications of the old properties of figure, magnitude, and motion; by means of which certain vibrations are communicated to the air, which, conveyed by the medium of the auditory nerves to the *sensorium*, produce the sensation of harmonic sounds. These new modifications are attended, indeed, with new and very wonderful effects; but then these effects are produced upon, and are themselves

selves modifications of the sentient or percipient faculty. And though it is wholly incomprehensible to us in what manner these effects, *i. e.* these sensations are produced, we well know and perfectly comprehend that they are not new powers belonging to any organized system of matter; and that they are far from militating against, and much less invalidating that grand and universal axiom, that the power of the whole is nothing more than the united powers of all the parts. As to the last instance, of the power of *aqua regia* to dissolve gold, though neither the spirit of salt or the spirit of nitre, of which it is compounded, separately possess that power, it is plain that from the union of those two substances certain new modes of configuration and motion result; and the solution of gold is the consequence of this new arrangement and motion of the parts. But the particles of which the menstruum is composed were always possessed of the properties of figure and motion; and what is stiled a new property is clearly nothing more than a new effect of the old properties differently modified.

In a word, the advocates for Materialism may be safely challenged to produce, in the whole compass of nature, a case which bears the least analogy to that which these instances were adduced to prove and illustrate. It is an absurdity
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which transubstantiation itself does not exceed^d. to maintain that a whole possesses any thing more than, or that in reality it is any thing different from its component parts; and all nature rises up in confutation of an assertion so monstrous and extravagant. To affirm that perception can arise from any combination of impercipient particles is as truly ridiculous as to maintain, that a combination of the seven primary colours with the four cardinal virtues may constitute a planet. It is equivalent to an assertion, that an epic poem might be composed of parallelograms, cones, and triangles: and the absurdity is not inferior to that of the blind man, who thought the idea of scarlet resembled the sound of a trumpet.

THIS is the sum and substance of that famous argument in which the Immaterialists universally confide, and to which, when assailed by all the metaphysical artillery of their antagonists, they retreat as to a fortress absolutely impregnable. That system, however specious in other respects, which involves in it an absurdity, can never be true; and, if truth is consistent with itself, the system to which it stands opposed can never be false. A certain valorous champion of the material hypothesis* has, however, undertaken, in a desperate effort of knight-errantry, to reduce the

* Vide TRACTS, Ethical and Theological, by T. Cooper, Esq. Member of the Manchester Society.

whole system of Immaterialism to a chaotic mass of contradictions and improbabilities, which it may now be expedient cursorily to examine as they are stated by the learned and ingenious writer.

1st, An immaterial soul has no common property with matter, therefore it cannot act upon matter; but all Immaterialists affirm, or with very few exceptions, that it can and does act upon matter; and this is a direct contradiction.

ANSWER, That substances, possessed of no common property, cannot act or re-act on each other, remains to be proved, before any contradiction can be imputed to the Immaterialists. And, if proved, the Immaterialists might sufficiently maintain their consistency, by having recourse to the hypotheses of Malebranche, Berkeley, or Leibnitz, according to the confession of Mr. Cooper himself, who says, “by the supposition of every system of Immaterialism, *except* those of Malebranche, Berkeley, and Leibnitz, which I am not now about to examine, it is deemed an essential property of the soul, that it acts upon the body or upon matter.” But if the solution of this difficulty, by a Malebranche or a Leibnitz, is not thought worth examining into, it can avail little to offer any other. If there are established laws in nature, in conformity to which certain affections of the material organized system

tem invariable produce, or are uniformly attended by correspondent affections of the percipient principle, and if, on the other hand, certain affections of the percipient principle invariably produce the correspondent affections in the organical system, it may with propriety be said, that they act and re-act on each other; whether we should, in the language commonly used, stile these immediate incitements to action efficient causes, or whether we may chuse, with the French philosopher, to consider them merely as “occasional causes.”

2dly, The immortality of the soul is asserted by the Immaterialists to be the necessary consequence of its immateriality; but, in all leipothymic cases, a total cessation of perception takes place, which is inconsistent with the idea of its natural immortality.

ANSWER. That the natural immortality of the soul, considered as an active principle, is admitted by all Immaterialists to be the necessary consequence of its immateriality, is a mistake. Many regret this consequence without hesitation. Those Cartesian Immaterialists, who believe the essence of the soul to consist in consciousness, will undoubtedly deny that in any case there is a total cessation of thought and perception. The essence of the soul, however, it is far more probable, does not consist in actual perception or consciousness; but

in a capacity of perception, which may be exerted or not under different circumstances and in different situations. And this capacity, or abstract principle of perception, which cannot, if the preceding reasoning be not fallacious, *inhere* in a material substance, may as easily be supposed susceptible of revival after death, as after its temporary suspension in the leipothymic cases of perfect sleep, apoplexy, or deliquium.

3dly, All our ideas originally proceed from impressions made on our senses : so that, independently of the body, the phænomena of thought and perception could not have existed. But the Immaterialists affirm that the soul exists separately from, and acts independently of the body, which is a contradiction.

ANSWER. Those Immaterialists who maintain the suspension of the power of perception after death, are not concerned in the confutation of this objection. They who assert an uninterrupted continuity of consciousness might plausibly enough reply, that ideas and impressions, once excited in the mind by the instrumentality of the senses may, without any contradiction, be supposed to remain even after the dissolution of the corporeal system, as ideas of vision remain when the eye is closed or enveloped in darkness. To this purpose the celebrated Bishop Butler observes “ that it is evident our present powers and capacities of reason, memory, and affection,
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do not depend upon our gross body in the manner in which perception by our organs of sense does. Nor do they appear to depend upon it at all in any such manner as to give ground to think, that the dissolution of this body will be the destruction of our present powers of reflection as it will of our powers of sensation*." To affirm that the soul or sentient principle cannot *exist* independent of, or separate from the body, is merely *gratis dictum*. It is incontrovertible, that the abstract principle or capacity of perception does actually exist when its operations are to all appearance totally suspended; as in all cases of leipothymic affection: and whether this abstract principle or faculty, which is sometimes dormant and sometimes operative, appertains to a material or immaterial essence, is the very question to be decided.

4thly, If the soul exist at all, it must exist somewhere, must occupy some part of space. It is therefore extended; and, if it acts upon matter, and is acted upon by matter, it attracts and repels, *for* there is no conceivable affection of matter but what is founded on the properties of attraction and repulsion. And if it be attracted and repelled, its re-action must be attraction and repulsion: but, as these comprise all the properties

* Butler's Analogy, Chap. I, p. 35.

of matter, the soul is material, and the immaterial hypothesis is involved in a contradiction.

ANSWER. This pretended contradiction resolves itself into a mere *petitio principii*. How does it appear that an immaterial principle of perception, if it exist, must occupy any part or portion of space? By far the most prevalent opinion with Immaterialists themselves is, that it bears no relation to space; and that it is as improper to affirm that thought exists in space, as that duration exists in space. That matter is acted upon, or, in other words, is attracted and repelled by it, is a certain fact, however incomprehensible: and that the mind is acted upon by matter, or that ideas and perceptions are excited in the mind by certain affections of matter, is also a fact equally certain and incomprehensible. But these incomprehensibilities are not precisely of the nature of contradictions. That “there is no conceivable affection of matter but what is founded on the properties of attraction and repulsion” will easily be admitted. Nay, this is an axiom, the edge of which is fatal to the material hypothesis, as to the paynim foe the enchanted sword of Durindana; *because* the affections of the conscious or percipient principle cannot possibly, by any skill in metaphysics, be resolved into modes of attraction and repulsion.

So much for the contradictions so boldly
charged

charged upon the Immaterial system. Let us now descend to the improbabilities connected with it; a slight notice of which it may be hoped will suffice.

1st, The first improbability is deduced from the consideration of the divisibility of ideas. If ideas are divisible, it follows, as we are not capable of conceiving how any thing that is divisible can exist in any thing that is not divisible, that the soul is likewise divisible, and, therefore, extended and material.

This is a specimen of metaphysic lore, certainly not less dark and mysterious to the apprehensions of the "uninitiated," than can be found in the writings of Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus, though in Mr. Cooper's estimation "the clearest of all arguments." For want of better instruction it has been hitherto supposed, that an idea was a mere affection of the mental principle, absolutely and obviously incapable of any separate or distinct existence. If ideas are divisible they must certainly possess figure and extension; and the profound sagacity of Mr. Cooper may, perhaps, in time discover the exact proportion subsisting between the different magnitudes of the idea and the archetype. It would be a very uncommon gratification of philosophical curiosity, for instance, to ascertain the true geometrical dimensions of the IDEA of St. Peter's church

at Rome, or of the pyramids of Egypt, or the mountains of the moon. If ideas are extended, Mr. Cooper will not deny them the properties of attraction and repulsion, so that the terms hard, soft, &c. are properly applicable to them. And if they have figure, they must be cubical, conical, circular, hexagonal, &c. As ideas correspond in all respects with their external archetypes, they doubtless, also, are of various hues and colours, blue, green, red, orange: so that the idea of an ivory ball, according to the principles of this new philosophy, is an hard, round, white, smooth idea. By the idea of heat we must be warmed, by the idea of cold we must be chilled; and it is plain that the poet knew nothing of metaphysics when he exclaimed—

“ O ! who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus ?
Or wander naked in December's snow
By thinking on fantastic summer's heat ? ”

This new theory of ideas it is much to be feared that the reader, unless he fortunately happen to be a man of extraordinary perspicacity, will not deem very clear; but Mr. Cooper may nevertheless be perfectly justified in affirming, “ that it is impossible to produce any mode of proof which shall make it appear more clear.”

2dly, It is improbable that any substituted
hypothesis

hypothesis should be true, which does not explain phenomena better than the more obvious hypothesis rejected as inadequate to account for appearances.

This is a very commodious argument, which may be applied in favour of, or in opposition to any hypothesis whatever. And Mr. Cooper may rest perfectly satisfied that the *abettors* of Immaterialism, as he styles them, deeming Immaterialism perhaps a species of felony or treason, as well as their antagonists, adopt that hypothesis which to them appear best calculated, upon the whole, to solve the actually existing phenomena.

3dly, As all our ideas are ideas of material objects, being originally derived through the medium of the senses, we can have no idea at all of the soul, which is an immaterial substance, and the existence of an object of which we can form no idea must be considered as highly problematical.

This is a palpable sophism, confounding the power or faculty of perception with the objects or immediate acts of perception, which are doubtless originally derived through the medium of the senses. From the consciousness of perception we infer the existence of the abstract power or faculty of perception, and from the nature of this power we demonstrate that it cannot appertain

to a solid, extended, discernible substance. If it be objected, that of the specific nature of that substance of which perception is a property we know nothing; we reply, that this is not necessary, or, to use an *equivoque*, it is not “material.” And a pun may surely be considered as a sufficient reply to a quibble.

4thly, If the soul be simple, uncompounded, and indiscernible, it cannot be liable to change; but we can trace all the various phænomena of perception from their commencement to their *acmé*, and thence, through their decline, to their total evanescence.

ANSWER. The soul, being a simple uncompounded essence, cannot indeed be supposed liable to dissolution from natural causes like the body, which is an organized machine, consisting of an infinity of distinct particles. But there is not any imaginable ground for supposing that the affections excited in the mind, in consequence of its union with an organized system of matter, should be incapable of change. On the contrary, it is highly reasonable to believe, that if matter is capable of acting upon the mind, it would operate in a manner exactly corresponding to all the known existing phænomena.

5thly, The strict Immaterialists represent the body as a burden, a clog, a prison to the soul; how is this consistent with the fact, that none of
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the mental phænomena can be exerted but in concert with the body?

As this is a troublesome question, and concerns the strict Immaterialists only, it may very properly be left to them, if any strict enough for Mr. Cooper's purpose can be found to make their own strictures upon it.

6thly, As there is not only no direct evidence for the existence of an immaterial soul, but all the evidence the nature of the thing will admit against it, the reasoning by which its existence is inferred ought to be absolutely irrefragable. But the possibility of disputing the validity of the reasoning is itself a proof that it is not irrefragable; therefore the hypothesis which rests upon it for support is an improbable hypothesis.

This objection, ingenious and novel as it may appear at first view, seems to resolve itself into this well-founded and long established aphorism; that if any hypothesis be supported by irrefragable evidence, and if any other hypothesis opposed to the hypothesis in question be supported by evidence which is not irrefragable, then we may venture to pronounce with an high degree of assurance and certainty, that it is probable the first hypothesis is true and the second hypothesis erroneous; or in other words, that it is improbable the first hypothesis should be erroneous, and that the second hypothesis should be true, in
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which oracular decision it would be perverse and captious not to acquiesce. Let us therefore proceed to the objection which states,

7thly, That to every Protestant it will appear no small presumption against the existence of a soul, that it was and still is the only support of the Popish doctrines of purgatory and indulgence; and also, as we are informed in the next objection, which may properly enough be classed with the preceding one,

8thly, Of the vulgar notion of apparitions.

Doubtless, for one, I should be extremely happy to see the downfall of Popish and of Protestant superstition; but I should no more dream of recommending the system of Materialism in order to effect it, than I should think of inculcating Atheism for the purpose of putting an end to idolatry.

9thly, It is an argument against the probability of the immaterial hypothesis, that it is a *spawn* of the Oriental or Gnostic philosophy.

Certainly if this hypothesis be a *spawn* of the Oriental philosophy, it ought to be rejected with becoming disdain and indignation. But if we dismiss this indelicate metaphor, and stile it simply a *branch* of the Oriental philosophy, then indeed we might deem it deserving of some attention; as it is not absolutely impossible that the Oriental system of philosophy might contain at least

least one truth, though it should be combined with a thousand errors.

10thly, This opinion of a distinct immaterial principle is neither connected with religion, nor of any kind of use to morality.

This surely is not consonant to fact—the opinion in question adding both credibility and consistency to the Christian doctrine of a resurrection. But supposing the justice of the observation, how is the truth or probability of the opinion affected by it?

11thly, That this dogma of Immaterialism is not so incontrovertibly evident as in general has been supposed, is plain: because the question has been discussed almost two thousand years, and *some* of the wisest and best of mankind still remain unconvinced.

This objection seems to admit that the majority of the learned in all ages have declared themselves in favor of the immaterial hypothesis, and it is not a little difficult to divine how the improbability of it can be inferred from the fact thus conceded. If to have failed in obtaining an universal reception be with Mr. Cooper a consideration of any weight, why hesitate to apply this reasoning to Christianity; against which it may be urged, with at least as much plausibility, as against what he is pleased to stile the *spawn* of the Oriental philosophy? But an appeal to the
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numbers of those who have embraced or rejected any tenet of philosophy or religion, is the most fallacious of all arguments. Though Mr. Cooper's method of pronouncing that opinion improbable, which is received by the greater number, is perhaps full as good a criterion of truth, as the more prevalent and popular practice, which consigns over the minority to the regions of darkness as heretics, schismatics, and children of the Devil.

12thly and 13thly, It is notorious that brutes have all the phænomena termed mental; and late discoveries make it extremely probable, that even vegetables are also endowed with perception; consequently brutes and vegetables are possessed of immaterial and immortal souls. And in proportion to this absurdity is the hypothesis of Immaterialism, on which it is founded, improbable.

I cannot perceive that this objection, which is very vehemently and pompously urged, contains any thing formidable. Whether brutes, and if you please vegetables, are proper subjects of God's moral government, is a problem, the solution of which is attended with equal difficulty on each hypothesis. If it be determined in the affirmative, a restoration of the power of perception will of course take place at some future period; and it certainly does not add to the difficulty,

difficulty, to suppose that the immaterial substance in which that power resides was never actually annihilated. If, on the other hand, they are not allowed to be responsible or moral agents, the annihilation, or perhaps, the transmigration of the immaterial principle may reasonably be supposed to accompany the dissolution of the organical system. Certainly, however, the ignorance in which we are involved respecting this subject cannot affect the truth of an hypothesis, previously established on the basis of rational evidence. To the question, therefore; What, upon the system of Immaterialism, becomes of the immaterial principle in brutes, and the inferior orders of sentient beings, in general, when separated from the body? I answer, in the words of CICERO, “Nescio, nec me pudet ut istos, fateri nescire quod nesciam.”

14thly, The same arguments which are adduced to prove the existence of one immaterial soul, if really well founded, will also serve to prove the existence of various other distinct immaterial principles. This is so obvious, that the distinction between the *anima intellectualis*, the *anima vitalis*, and the *anima sensitiva* is of very great antiquity.

If this objection be obvious, the answer to it is certainly not less so. All affections of mind are but different modes of perception; all affec-
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tions of matter are only different modes of motion. The *anima vitalis* is evidently an affection of matter, which resolves itself into a mode of motion. The *anima intellectualis*, and the *anima sensitiva*, are different modes of perception, and affections of the mental principle. It argues the most deplorable ignorance of rational metaphysics in the ancient philosophers, to maintain the existence of three distinct principles in man: and to pretend that the immaterial hypothesis is chargeable with any such absurd consequence, is certainly not the most satisfactory proof of very superior knowledge in a modern philosopher.

LASTLY, If the doctrine of a separate immaterial principle were in itself a point perfectly clear, it must appear wonderful that the opinions of its *abettors* should be so discordant. The Orientals, for instance, supposed our souls to be emanations from fire; Aristoxenes said, the soul was harmony; Zenocrates said it was number, &c. &c.

But let the objector say upon what subject men have not held discordant opinions; yet, surely, there is such a thing as truth, and it is incumbent upon every one, according to his ability, to endeavor to ascertain it. It would be preposterous to abandon an hypothesis which appears just and rational, because the philosophers of the East or of the West may have talked nonsense
upon

upon the subject. No man is chargeable with the errors of another; and for the philosophical paradoxes or absurdities of Aristoxenes or Zenocrates, Aristoxenes and Zenocrates only can be deemed responsible.

AFTER thus enumerating all the impossibilities and improbabilities attending the hypothesis of a distinct immaterial soul, Mr. Cooper proceeds to examine all the arguments which have in the course of his reading occurred to him in favor of that hypothesis. And here, in my humble opinion, the triumphs of Mr. Cooper commence. He attacks with equal intrepidity and success the strong holds of Immaterialism: and by dint of irresistible prowess compels them to surrender at discretion. But fortunately for the Immaterialists, one argument, if conclusive, is equivalent to a thousand; and the reasoning advanced in the former part of this Essay, notwithstanding the gallant exploits of Mr. Cooper, still remains in full force, uninjured, unaffected, unimpaired. The two pillars, on which the whole weight of this argument rests, are these plain and simple propositions: 1st, From figure, magnitude and motion, however divided or compounded, nothing can possibly result but different modifications of figure, magnitude and motion. And, 2dly, Every system is the sum or aggregate of the parts which compose that system; and the properties

properties of every system are consequently the sum or aggregate of the properties of all its parts.

As to the first of these propositions, Mr. Cooper is willing to grant that the particles which compose our frame, and the motion of those particles, may properly be termed magnitude and motion. And he contents himself with simply asserting what he styles the *fact*, that whatever perception may be, or however it arise, it is actually the result, consequence, or effect of the magnitude and motion of the particles of our corporeal system: but of the *rationale* he expressly declines offering at present any explanation; though he informs us that some future time will, he doubts not, afford *data* by which a satisfactory explanation may be attempted; *i. e.* notwithstanding his present ignorance, he hopes in time to become so profound an adept in the *arcana* of nature, as to be capable of explaining how a fact may be true which is already demonstrated to be false. If this answer should not happen to give perfect satisfaction, he will produce another still more ingenious and decisive. It is objected that perception cannot possibly be the result of any possible combination of figure, magnitude and motion. Mr. Cooper, however, will undertake to prove, that it is just three to one but it may. To make this matter perfectly clear

clear, he assures us, “ that all the phænomena of thought may be comprized under perception, recollection. judgment and volition, the three latter of which Dr. Hartley has demonstrably proved to be modes of motion.” The calculation, therefore, is easy and obvious *to the weakest capacity*, that if three out of four of all the modes of thought are confessedly modes of motion, it is precisely three to one that the remaining mode of thought is likewise a mode of motion*. This method of calculation is so perfectly novel and happy, that it is with reluctance I presume to remind the learned gentleman, that Dr. Hartley was so far from actually demonstrating that recollection, judgment, and volition were modes of motion, that he never even attempted any such demonstration. Recollection, judgment, and volition are, according to Dr. Hartley’s admirable theory of the human mind, not magnitude and

* Least any suspicion of unfairness in the statement of this extraordinary argument should arise, it may be proper to transcribe the words of Mr. Cooper himself: “ All the phænomena of thought may be comprized under perception, recollection, judgment, and volition. Of these, the three latter are demonstrably modes of motion: Hartley has proved it. Now, as the assertion I am opposing hath always, so far as I know, been hazarded as self-evident, or upon grounds which I have elsewhere refuted, I apprehend the probabilities in favor of my assertion are to the contrary as three to one.”

COOPER’S Tracts, p. 273-4.

motion, but merely phænomena resulting from, or connected with certain modifications of magnitude and motion: no writer on the subject would more indignantly reject the position of Mr. Cooper, page 285, "that a compound of matter may have properties which are not magnitude and motion:" and it could only arise from a determination at all events to press the name of Dr. Hartley into the service of Materialism that so strange an assertion should be hazarded, or so random a reference be made. According to the hypothesis of Dr. Hartley, which as he himself observes bears a strong analogy to that of Malebranche and Leibnitz, there is a regular, fixed, and invariable correspondence subsisting between certain vibrations of the nervous system and certain affections of the percipient principle: and that this celebrated philosopher should deviate into the gross absurdity of confounding any of the various modes of perception with the modes of motion by which they are produced, or, to speak more accurately, with which they are associated, is just as likely as that he should mistake a fiddle for a tune, or a perspective glass for a prospect. "I suppose or postulate," says that great man, "in my first proposition, that sensations arise in the soul from motions excited in the medullary substance of the brain; a postulatum which precludes all

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POSSIBILITY of proving the Materiality of the soul from this theory afterwards." And again, "It is sufficient for me that there is a certain connection of one kind or other between the sensations of the soul, and the motions excited in the medullary substance of the brain. I would not, therefore, be any way interpreted so as to oppose the immateriality of the soul. ON the CONTRARY, I see clearly, and acknowledge readily, that MATTER and MOTION, however subtly divided or reasoned upon, YIELD nothing more than MATTER and MOTION still." Hartley's Observations on Man, Chap. V. Sect. 1.

To the second grand axiom on which the immaterial hypothesis rests, viz. "That the power of every system is the sum or aggregate of the powers of all its parts," Mr. Cooper replies, that in all mechanical compounds, where the aggregate is formed not by the combination but by the juxtaposition of its component parts, this remark may perhaps be true; but in all chemical cases, and in all cases of vegetation and animalization, the contrary is known to be the fact. And he corroborates his assertion by appealing to the authority of Mr. Fourcroy, whose eighth law of the affinity of composition is as follows: "Two or more bodies, which have united by the affinity of composition, form a substance

whose properties are new, and very different from those which any of the substances had before their union." In answer to this, it is necessary to recall to Mr. Cooper's recollection his own concession, "*that there is no conceivable affection of matter but what is founded on its properties of attraction and repulsion.*" If this be the case, certainly the new properties resulting from chemical and vegetable, as well as mechanical combinations, are, in fact, nothing more than new modifications of the pre-existing properties. An endless diversity of phænomena will, undoubtedly, arise from new combinations of matter, whether those combinations are mechanical or chemical; but even in the elaborate and ostentatious catalogue of chemical combinations, introduced into Mr. Cooper's *curious* tract upon identity, the Materialist may be safely challenged to point out a single case, which does not very easily and obviously resolve itself into a new result or modification of the old-fashioned properties of figure, magnitude, and motion. When mercury and the marine acid, for example, are perfectly united and become sublimate, does the sublimate possess any properties in addition to those already enumerated, or specifically different from them? Or, are the different effects, which the union of the two substances is calculated to produce, more or less than new modes
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of configuration and motion? Chemists, indeed, who are not obliged to express themselves with metaphysical precision, stile these new results, which are themselves productive of other results, thus revolving in ceaseless change, “the great perpetual circle multiform,” new properties. But the metaphysician views all these changes with an eye of indifference, well knowing that “all the conceivable affections of matter are founded on the properties of attraction and repulsion.”

The general *rationale* of the acquirement of new properties by a compound, Mr. Cooper thinks so well expressed by Collins, in his answer to Clarke, that he chuses to transcribe the passage, which is as follows: “I will allow that matter is every-where, under the same circumstances, endowed with the same powers; and that taking the whole material world together, every particle thereof is capable of contributing to all the actual powers of matter equally with any other particle whatever. But then, if these actual powers exist but under such and such regulations, and that a disposition of parts, by motion, be necessary to the exertion of every power, it will equally follow that the power of every system will not be the sum of powers of the same kind, but be the sum of powers of different kinds: because, by the different situation of parts in a system, a different power is exerted in every particle, though each of them

would exert the same power under the same circumstance or position. And I much rather take this to be the case, than to suppose really different powers founded on different capacities in the different parts of matter, for by experience we see, that every thing by change of form becomes every thing."

This opinion of Collins may possibly be very just; but I am totally at a loss to conceive how it militates against the general principle, that the power of the whole is the sum of the powers, however denominated, of all the parts. "All this," says Dr. Clarke, in reference to this passage, "is entirely beside the purpose, and serves only to perplex a question to which it bears no relation." Allowing that the primary particles of matter are, as Mr. Collins supposes, endowed with equal powers; though exerted only under certain circumstances; is it not plain that these powers, all of which are resolvable into modes of motion, when united in the same system, are *actually* exerted; though previous to the formation of the system they might perhaps be suspended? When exerted, however, the power of the system is evidently the mere result or aggregate of the powers of its component parts.

Mr. Hobbes, on the other hand, was of opinion, as Mr. Cooper informs us, that though the properties of a compound must be really similar
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in kind to that of the parts, in a state of separation, the properties might inhere in each part so faintly and so approaching to evanescence, as to be discoverable only in a condensed state in the aggregate. This opinion was, as Mr. Cooper asserts, ridiculed by Dr. Clarke. But if this opinion is erroneous, it is far from being ridiculous; and though I have read Dr. Clarke's works, as well as the learned gentlemen, I recollect no such thing. The truth is, that Hobbes applied this principle, which, if admissible, can be predicated of material combinations and properties only, to the case of perception; and maintained, that the power of perception in man might be the result of an infinite number of inferior and subordinate perceptions, or tendencies to perception, inhering in the particles of which the corporeal organized system is composed:—an opinion which Mr. Cooper regards as extremely ingenious and plausible; but which was, it must be acknowledged, treated with ridicule and contempt by Dr. Clarke, and deemed by that illustrious philosopher to be the very *acmé* of nonsense and absurdity. If the faint and evanescent perceptions of ten thousand atoms may so coalesce as to form one human perception, doubtless the perceptions of ten thousand human beings may so coalesce as to form one angelic perception; and a proportionable number of

angelic perceptions, consequently, into a super-angelic perception; and so on in an ascending series, *ad infinitum*; which seems a conclusion worthy of the angelic Doctor Thomas Aquinas himself. And if we farther consider, that the inferior percipiences of which the human perception is compounded must, upon this hypothesis, be resolvable into percipiences of a still lower order, and so on in a descending series, *ad infinitum*, the system of Mr. Hobbes must be acknowledged very amusing, at least, if not very credible. The generality of Materialists, however, have thought it more expedient to maintain that perception is the property of the system, *as such*, insisting that the component particles of the system, though themselves impercipient, may possess occult powers, from which the property of perception may result. And in strict and perfect conformity to this mode of reasoning, these philosophers might, with equal plausibility, maintain that the extension or magnitude of Mount Atlas is the property of the mountain *as such*. For allowing the particles of which the mountain is constituted to be of themselves destitute of magnitude, they may nevertheless be endowed with occult and wonderful powers, such as we are unable at present to form any conception of, from which the property of extension may result.

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Here, therefore, the advocates of Materialism are involved in an exquisite dilemma. Doth perception really and truly inhere in the particles which compose the organical system? then is the human mind a mere assemblage of distinct and infinitely divisible percipiences, which is a gross and palpable absurdity. OR, is perception the property merely of the system, as such, without inhering in the component parts? then is the power of the whole absolutely and totally different from, and not the sum or aggregate of the powers of all the parts, which is an express and direct contradiction.

ESSAY XIV.

REMARKS ON POPE'S ESSAY ON MAN.

VARIOUS and discordant have been the opinions of critics and commentators respecting this celebrated performance. That it possesses a distinguished share of poetic excellence none, however, have yet ventured to deny. M. Voltaire goes so far as to affirm, that to this Essay Pope stands indebted for that pre-eminence which he ascribes to him, when compared with his illustrious predecessor Dryden. But that Pope is actually entitled to this claim of superiority is, at least, very problematical ; and if it was allowed, the Rape of the Lock, the Epistle of Eloise, the Eclogue of the Messiah, and some other pieces that might be mentioned, would generally be considered as affording a better foundation for this claim to rest upon than the Essay on Man : in which poetry holds a subordinate place ; and in which it is merely employed, though with the happiest success, to embellish and illustrate the most abstruse lessons of philosophy. Dryden, indeed, has, in his Hind and Panther, given us a striking proof of the ease and spirit with which
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he was able to conduct a chain of reasoning in verse. His transitions are less abrupt, his expression less obscure, and his air and manner more free and unconstrained than those of Pope. On the other hand, in dignity of style, in sublimity of sentiment, and in beauty and variety of poetical ornament, Pope has incomparably the advantage. In reading the Essay on Man, we are tempted to exclaim with the rapture of the youth in *COMUS*,

“ How charming is divine Philosophy !
 Not harsh and rugged, as dull fools suppose,
 But musical as is Apollo's lute,
 And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets.”

It is well known that the general plan of this Essay was originally framed by Lord Bolingbroke, and it is universally believed that Pope was ignorant of the ultimate, and indeed the obvious tendency of his own arguments: and when he found that his principles were considered as subversive of religion, he eagerly embraced the assistance of Warburton, who undertook the Herculean task of rescuing them from that imputation. But that system of philosophy, which professes to justify the ways of God to man, without having recourse to the doctrine of a future state, must ever be considered as in the highest degree inimical to religion, whose very nature and essence it is to direct our views beyond the narrow limits of the present scene of existence. Dr.
 Johnson,

Johnson, certainly a critic of the highest order, thus delivers his sentiments upon the subject before us. "This essay affords an egregious instance of the predominance of genius, the dazzling splendor of imagery, and the seductive powers of eloquence. Never were penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised. The reader feels his mind full, though he learns nothing : and when he meets it in its new array, no longer knows the talk of his mother and his nurse. Metaphysical morality was to Pope a new study : he was proud of his acquisitions, and supposing himself master of great secrets, was in haste to teach what he had not learned." On the other hand, Dr. Warton, a writer of acknowledged taste and discernment, affirms "that the Essay on Man is as close a piece of argument, *admitting its principles*, as perhaps can be found in verse. It is hardly to be imagined how much sense, how much thinking, how much observation on human life is condensed together in a small compass." But the grand *postulatum* advanced by Pope, that God is a being possessed of infinite perfections, is unquestionably a just principle ; and his failure arises out of his subsequent attempt to prove, that the natural and moral phænomena of the universe are consonant to the perfections of the divine nature ; so that it is not easy to comprehend the propriety

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or even the meaning of this panegyric. And if Dr. Warton's applause and admiration are excited by the argumentative merits of this poem, it is to be feared that he is betrayed into this false judgment by the Poet's splendor of eloquence and pomp of declamation.

Mr. Pope, in this famous Essay, has undertaken the mighty task of vindicating the ways of God to man, in compliance, as Lord Bolingbroke himself informs us, with the express wish of his noble friend. If we consider the very dangerous tendency of the system of philosophy here inculcated, it may well be suspected that the original design on the part of Bolingbroke was a deep and insidious one. Not that Pope has adopted the opinions of Bolingbroke in their full extent: he had too just a sense of the importance of religion, and too much regard for the welfare of society, not to reject them, when openly proposed, with indignation. But coming to him disguised in so pleasing a form, it cannot be thought very wonderful, that a man who had little accustomed himself to metaphysical disquisitions should be allured and deceived by so fair and specious a semblance. The object of Bolingbroke was, apparently, to explode the commonly received opinions relative to a future state. There are two very different modes by which this may be attempted. The first, which
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is Bolingbroke's own method, is to insinuate, not only that the physical arguments usually alleged in proof of the soul's immortality are wholly inconclusive; but that the moral arguments, deduced from the consideration of the moral attributes of the Deity, are equally destitute of solidity; because those attributes are themselves destitute of satisfactory proof. The other method, which is that suggested by his Lordship to Pope, is, to receive as a fundamental principle, and as the basis of farther investigation, the truth of the divine attributes, natural and moral; and to affirm, that the plan of Providence actually exhibited to our view, so far as it is capable of being comprehended by us, is, in all respects, consonant to the perfections of the divine nature: and if so, we can have no more reason to conclude that the present life is connected with a future state, than on that more daring hypothesis which absolutely denies the existence of those perfections.

To the first mode of reasoning, which is, without doubt, of a nature much more subtle and perplexing than the latter, it may be answered in a few words, that though a complete demonstration of the infinity of the divine goodness is not to be attained, yet it is manifest that good preponderates in the universe in a very great degree, and that the farther we carry our researches,
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the more numerous and the more striking are the proofs we discover of benevolence, as well as of wisdom and power. It is, therefore, fair to conclude, that beings of more exalted capacity would form proportionably higher conceptions of the moral as well as natural attributes of the Supreme Being; and that as we have reason to believe his power and wisdom to be infinite, not being able to conceive more illustrious displays of those attributes than the works of creation and providence actually present to our view, so it is highly reasonable to suppose, that the attribute of benevolence, if it exist at all, must exist in a manner analogous to the rest; *i. e.* we ought to suppose it to be infinite. But if, contrary to all the principles of analogy and good sense, we should admit a limitation of the principle of benevolence in the Divine Mind, for which no one can pretend to assign any adequate, or even any possible cause, yet a degree of wisdom, power, and benevolence, far short of infinite, would lead us to expect, in some future period, another and a better state of things, in which the disorders and irregularities so conspicuous at present, and so inconsistent with the wisdom and goodness discoverable in the general constitution of the universe, may be redressed or rectified, and the ways of God to man be finally and completely vindicated,

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We now proceed to the second supposition, or the hypothesis actually embraced by Mr. Pope; according to which the belief of a future state must be dismissed from our creed as superfluous, the general plan of Providence admitting of a vindication independent of this grand and comprehensive solution.

SAY first, of GOD above or man below
 What can we reason, but from what we know?
 Of man what see we but his station here
 From which to reason or to which refer?
 Thro' worlds unnumber'd tho' the GOD be known,
 'Tis our's to trace him only in our own.
 He who thro' vast immensity can pierce,
 See worlds on worlds compose one universe,
 Observe how system into system runs,
 What other planets circle other suns,
 What varied being peoples every star,
 May tell why Heaven has made us as we are, &c..

We cannot but feel some emotions of surprise, after the lofty language of the exordium, to see the poet so soon abandon his design, and, instead of offering a vindication of Providence, content himself with affirming, that a being endowed with powers far surpassing human capacity might possibly succeed in this arduous undertaking.— For a *vindication* unexpectedly substituting an *apology*.

Presumptuous man! the reason would'st thou find
 Why form'd so weak, so little, and so blind?

First,

First, if thou can'st, the harder reason guess,
 Why form'd no weaker, blinder, and no less.
 Ask of thy mother earth why oaks are made
 Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?
 Or ask of yonder argent fields above,
 Why Jove's satellites are less than Jove?

Undoubtedly, it is the height of presumption and impiety to arraign the wisdom and goodness of Divine Providence in the formation of such a creature as man; for supposing a certain degree of happiness imparted to a created and dependent being, how can that being have a right to claim from its Creator and benefactor a degree of happiness superior to that actually conferred? But the question to be solved is, whether, granting the existence of such an imperfect being, it is most conformable to our ideas of infinite wisdom and goodness to suppose, that after a few revolutions of the sun he is to sink again into annihilation; or, as he is formed with a capacity for unlimited improvement in moral and intellectual excellence, that the present life is only preparatory to another state of existence, in which he may have ample scope to fulfil all the wise and beneficent purposes of his creation? Certainly, if we are at liberty to argue upon the hypothesis of a Supreme Superintending Intelligence, infinite in all perfections, the latter supposition must be, according to our ideas of wisdom and goodness, far more honourable to the divine go-

vernment, and therefore more consistent and more probable than the former. But conclusions of this nature Mr. Pope does not attempt to draw ; he satisfies himself with saying coldly,

Respecting man whatever wrong we call,
May, must be right, as relative to all.

This, indeed, inevitably results from the absolute perfection of the Divine Nature ; but then it is much more satisfactory to infer a renovation of our existence as necessary to the completion of a plan of perfect wisdom and benevolence, than to argue, as this philosophical Poet indirectly does, against the probability of a future state of existence, because the present scene of things, however inexplicable, independently considered, may, nay, must be right, considered as a part of the universal system. Admitting the infinity of the moral as well as natural perfections of the Deity, we cannot, indeed, absolutely demonstrate the reality of a future state, because our ignorance and inadequacy of comprehension render it impossible for us positively to pronounce the annihilation of the human race to be incompatible with those perfections ; but surely it is incompatible with such ideas of infinite wisdom and goodness as the limits of human knowledge will suffer us to attain ; and, therefore, the dictates of natural reason direct us to a contrary

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conclusion; for, as Mr. Pope himself well observes, “ What can we reason but from what we know ?”—

Hope humbly, then, with trembling pinions soar,
 Wait the great teacher Death; and God adore.
 What future bliss he gives not thee to know,
 But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.
 Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
 Man never is, but always to be blest:
 The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,
 Rests and expatiates in a life to come.

In this passage Mr. Pope has thought proper, however inconsistently with the general tenor of his reasonings, to refer us to a future state for a solution of all our doubts and difficulties. Those difficulties, viewed in the proper light, form indeed of themselves a strong presumption of a future state, from their apparent incongruity with the general plan of Providence. But the Poet, by representing these apparent incongruities as arising merely from our inability to comprehend the perfect order established by the Great Directing Mind, supercedes the necessity of recurring to the solution of a future state. By a very easy and compendious process, he first takes it for granted, that the perfections of the Deity are infinite; and then takes it for granted, that the natural and moral phænomena of the universe *must* be consonant to those perfections. If you ask

for proofs, he exclaims, “Presume not GOD to scan.”—“To reason right is to submit.”—“In pride, in reasoning pride our error lies.” And the greatest merit is to rest satisfied in our own ignorance; believing every thing, though we know, and can know nothing.

If plagues or earthquakes break not Heaven’s design,
 Why then a Borgia, or a Cataline?
 Who knows but he whose hand the lightning forms,
 Who heaves old ocean, and who wings the storms,
 Pours fierce ambition in a Cæsar’s mind,
 Or turns young Ammon loose to scourge mankind?

These are noble and animated lines: the argument of which they form a part, divested of poetical expression and ornament, stands thus—Objections are raised against the general order of providence, from the consideration of the prevalence of moral evil. But if we admit that the existence of natural evil is consistent, the existence of moral evil cannot be inconsistent with the absolute perfection of the divine nature; for the same general solution will serve for both. GOD acts by general laws, and partial evil will necessarily result from the operation of those laws: but partial evil is universal good; and moral as well as natural evil may, by almighty power, be made subservient to the most salutary and beneficent purposes. It cannot be denied that the Poet so far reasons right, as his reason-
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ing tends to prove, that the existence of natural and the existence of moral evil are difficulties of the same nature and magnitude; and whatever will serve for a solution of the one will undoubtedly suffice for the solution of the other. But the grand difficulty still remains unsolved by the Poet, Whence comes either? In answer to this perplexing enquiry we are only assured, that

——— the first Almighty cause
Acts not by partial, but by general laws.

If the speculatist asks, “What makes all physical or moral ill?” the Poet immediately replies, “There deviates nature, and here wanders will.” “Pope,” says Dr. Warton, “here accounts for the introduction of moral evil from the abuse of man’s free will. This is the solid and scriptural solution of that grand and difficult question, which in vain hath puzzled and bewildered the speculatists of so many ages, ποθεν το κακον.” It is evident, however, that neither the Poet nor Critic were, in regard to this point, actuated by the spirit of that celebrated ancient, who, as it is said, being informed when a child that the heavens and earth rose out of chaos, first discovered his genius for philosophic investigation by asking, “And chaos whence?” Why is nature suffered to deviate, or the will to wander? If the great end be general happiness, and God be possessed

of infinite power and wisdom, have we not a right to expect the accomplishment of that end, by such means as are adapted to produce this effect in the highest possible degree? And to affirm that it is consistent with infinite wisdom to sacrifice happiness to a particular order of nature, or to a pretended freedom of agency, is to suppose it consistent with infinite wisdom to sacrifice the end to the means; or that which alone possesses intrinsic value, to that which is valuable only as the means of attaining it. For nothing is really valuable but as it tends to produce happiness. If indeed it could be demonstrated that partial evil is universal good, or that the general happiness is ultimately promoted by a mixture of evil, it would certainly amount to a complete vindication of the divine government. And this we know to be actually the case, in very numerous and striking instances daily offering themselves to our attention. But however imperfect this solution may be deemed, if we confine our observations to the present scene, upon the supposition of a future state the prospect "to reason's eye clears up apace," and we are able through the mists of ignorance and prejudice to discern, that purposes highly worthy of the omnipotent Creator are answered by the introduction of evil natural and moral into the universe. And let no one dare to indulge him-
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self in the practice of immorality and vice, under the vain pretext that the vices and imperfections of men are comprehended in the order of the universe; for it is equally true, and it can never be too deeply impressed upon the mind, that the punishment of vice is also an essential part of the same divine and perfect order.

Vast chain of being ! which from God began,
 Natures ætherial, human, angel, man,
 Beast, bird, fish, insect—what no eye can see,
 No glass can reach; from infinite to thee;
 From thee to nothing.—On superior powers
 Were we to press, inferior might on our's:
 Or in the full creation leave a void,
 Where one step broken the great scale's destroy'd.

On reading the entire passage whence these beautiful lines are transcribed, we cannot wonder that Pope should have chosen to treat this abstruse subject in a poetical form; for it must be confessed, that in humble prose this argument would make but a very indifferent figure. To pretend to vindicate Providence in the formation of so imperfect a being as man, by asserting, in direct terms, that if we had been advanced to an higher rank in the scale of creation universal confusion and anarchy must have ensued; and the system, of which we constitute a part, must, like the baseless fabric of a vision, have instantly dissolved, as he proceeds to affirm, could only

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have excited the derision of the atheistical objector. But, “in such splendid array,” as the great critic observes, “we no longer know the talk of the mother and the nurse.”

The least confusion but in one, not all
That system only, but the whole must fall.
Let earth, unbalanced, from her orbit fly,
Planets and stars run lawless thro' the sky;
Let ruling angels from their seats be hurl'd,
Being on being wreck'd, and world on world;
Heaven's whole foundations to their centre nod,
And nature tremble to the throne of God.
All this dread order break—for whom? for thee!
Vile worm!—O! madness, pride, impiety!

Here, doubtless, he deviates into the wildest philosophical rant, though it is animated and ennobled by the highest poetical enthusiasm.

Cease, then, nor order imperfection name;
Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.
Safe in the hand of one disposing power,
Or in the natal or the mortal hour.
All nature is but art, unknown to thee,
All chance direction, which thou can'st not see;
All discord harmony, not understood,
All partial evil universal good.
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear—“Whatever is—is right.”

It is no little satisfaction at last to acquiesce in the same general conclusion with Mr. Pope, however weak and inadequate the premises from
which

which it may have been deduced. It were an easy, but invidious task to expose, in a much greater variety of examples, the fallacious and dangerous reasonings of this famous Essay. As a moral philosopher, Mr. Pope is justly blameable for excluding from his system, or, at least, throwing, as it might well be supposed, purposely into the shade, that great principle, without which there is no essential or practical difference between Deism and Atheism—the immortality of the soul. At the same time, it would be injustice not to acknowledge that his poem abounds with striking and elevated reflections, admirably calculated to excite a spirit of rational and philosophical devotion; and there is good reason to entertain so favorable an opinion of his general character, as to believe, with a firm assurance, that if he had really conceived this Essay to be injurious to the cause of religion and virtue, he would have disdained to court any increase of poetical fame by its publication: and, as on a former occasion, with a noble indignation, would have exclaimed,

“ Oh! teach me, Heaven! to scorn the guilty bays;
Drive from my breast such wretched lust of praise.
Unblemish’d let me live, or die unknown;
Oh! grant an honest fame, or grant me none!”

ESSAY XV.

ON THE STUDY OF METAPHYSICS.

“FOR Metaphysics what can be said? If every book that has been written on them, and thousands have been written, were annihilated, not a single individual in the community of all mankind would in any one respect have just reason to lament the loss. Mathematical and arithmetical studies are speculative, it is true; but they do not terminate in speculation. The builder, the navigator, almost every mechanic art is assisted by geometry: and all men, without exception, benefited by arithmetic; but Metaphysics tend only to benight the understanding in a cloud of its own making; to lose it in a labyrinth of its own contrivance.”

Thus it is that a popular and ingenious Essayist has expressed his dislike and contempt of all metaphysical discussions, to which exactly the same regard is due as to the opinion of a blind man who should take it into his head to declaim upon the inutility of the study of optics. That branch of philosophy, which is distinguished by the term “Metaphysics,” comprehends in it a variety of topics, some of which are the most refined

fined and curious, and others the most interesting and important which the human mind is capable of investigating; and what degree of knowledge respecting these points is really attainable, can no more be ascertained by a mere classical scholar, than the most illiterate clown can pretend to form a conjecture concerning the truth or importance of the Newtonian theory. Mr. Knox expresses his regret, that so much stress is laid upon the study of Metaphysics in the general plan of academical education: and yet it is difficult to say, if it is at all to enter into the general plan, how less stress could well be laid upon it. Those who have capacities adequate to the contemplation of subjects of this nature, and whose attention is early directed to them, almost invariably become deeply interested in the pursuit: and thus a point of the highest importance is gained. For the magnitude and sublimity of these disquisitions have a manifest tendency to elevate the mind, to lessen in our estimation the value and importance of temporal pursuits; and, by the intimate relation they bear to religion both natural and revealed, to make the most beneficial as well as durable impressions upon the heart. How is it possible to make that stupendous Being, who called universe into existence, the subject of our frequent philosophical meditations, without feeling emotions of awe, of

gratitude,

gratitude, and devotion? Who can reflect without some degree of moral improvement, upon that miracle of divine power and skill, the human frame? “What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how excellent in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a God! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!” Were it, “to consider too curiously,” to enquire whether that principle of intelligence and perception, which raises us so high in the scale of existence, be the result of an exquisite arrangement of material particles, or whether it is capable of subsisting independently of the corporeal frame to which it is at present united? To say no more, who can contemplate the amazing extent and flexibility of the power of association, as explained and illustrated by Locke and Hartley, or the mechanical operation of motives in producing all our volitions, without being sensible of the unspeakable importance of attending to the early cultivation of the mind, and of inculcating, with all possible diligence, those laudable and virtuous principles, which, so far as they are not counteracted by opposite influences, must operate in a regular and definite manner? Why should any man, who happens to have no relish or capacity himself for these sublime researches, wish to deter
others

others from employing all the powers and faculties of their minds upon these as well as other subjects, equally mysterious to the vulgar; what is difficult, to explain; what is dark, to illumine?

While thus engaged, the mind feels its own weakness, it is true, but it feels its own strength and dignity too.

“ Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To rust in us unus'd!”

“ It is hardly possible, according to the observation of Dr. Akenfide, to conceive philosophy and taste at a greater distance from each other than at the period of the revolution, when Locke stood at the head of the one, and Dryden of the other.” But if they must be considered as in a state of opposition, and the characters of Dryden and Locke are to be placed in the balance together, surely the *bel esprit*, in comparison with the sage, must appear as light as a peacock’s feather weighed against an ingot of gold. An union between philosophy and taste is, however, by no means impracticable. The writings of Cicero alone afford sufficient proofs how susceptible the most abstract topics of philosophy are of the embellishments of imagination; and it is impossible not to remark what an inexpressible charm, and
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what an addition of dignity and of character Cicero derives from the anxious solicitude with which he pursued those researches, which the conductors of "Liberal Education," in our times, affect to treat with ridicule and contempt. To the exquisite beauties of those antient writings, which are justly regarded as the most perfect models of literary excellence, we are indeed indebted for the most refined pleasures. And in the present state of things, classical learning is so intimately blended with every other species of knowledge, that the study of the dead languages is become a matter of indispensable necessity to those who entertain the remotest views of intellectual improvement. But it must nevertheless be confessed, that classical literature is made too often and too much an ultimate object. There are many men of good natural understandings, and who pass for what we generally call good scholars, who are, in fact, most deplorably ignorant. They seem to consider the attainment of the learned languages as the great end of life; and as that is the species of learning which is most serviceable in the acquisition of academical honors, it is too frequently thought all that is necessary; and a total ignorance of those sublime investigations which open a new world to our intellectual view, is very easily convertible into a gross and stupid contempt of them.

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In one of our universities, indeed, mathematical science engages a very great and disproportionate share of the general attention. It has been often asserted, that the study of mathematics contributes to strengthen the judgment, to check the ravings of fancy, to fix the attention, and insensibly to infuse into the mind an habit of thinking accurately, and of arguing with precision even upon moral and philosophical subjects. Though this is an opinion very plausible, there is perhaps no maxim more entirely destitute of foundation; or one which is less able to abide the test of examination and experience. If we consider the fundamental which subsists between mathematical and moral reasonings, we must acknowledge that it is absolutely impracticable to transfer our ideas from the one to the other, so as to derive any advantage from the experiment. Nay, it is certain, that mathematicians have often been betrayed into egregious absurdities, by attempting to introduce mathematical ideas into subjects where they are totally inapplicable. Would the famous professor Wallis, for instance, if he had not been a mathematician, have incurred the risque of general ridicule, by comparing the three personal distinctions of the Godhead to the three dimensions of a cube, and the Godhead itself to a cube infinitely extended? If the study of mathematics contributes so much
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to bestow precision and accuracy in our reasonings on moral subjects, how can it be accounted for that Pascal, that prodigy of mathematical genius, should not have been able to discover the absurdity of the Popish doctrine of transubstantiation? If skill in geometrical science could be supposed to have any influence upon the general habits of thinking and reasoning, how comes it to pass that the Jesuits should have been celebrated as the most able mathematicians, whilst they were detested as the most inveterate bigots of modern times?

In fact, moral truth, not admitting, strictly speaking, of demonstration, *i. e.* of a species of proof which consists of the regular and uninterrupted deduction of one self-evident proposition from another, bears no analogy to mathematical truth, and requires a totally different kind of support. It is singular that those moral writers, who have most affected to reason with mathematical precision, and who abound most in the pomp and parade of demonstration, have in general been remarkably deficient as reasoners: and instead of demonstration, it is well if we do not meet with arrogant absurdity. Even the illustrious Clarke lies, perhaps, no where so open to animadversion as in his "*Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God.*" By taking "the high *priori* road," it is no difficult matter, as Pope has

has remarked, “to reason downward till we doubt of GOD.” In its attempts to investigate moral truths, the mind is perpetually occupied in the comparison of probabilities; and the man whose attention has been solely engrossed by the contemplation of truths, supported by infallible reasoning, will be as much at a loss when he is called upon to estimate the value of opposing probabilities, as if he had been taken immediately from the loom or from the plough. The sentiments of such persons upon subjects unconnected with geometrical science, are for the most part narrow and contracted, and their reasonings confused and inconsequential. Geometry is undoubtedly in itself a noble and important branch of knowledge; but it is very injudicious to make it a primary object with the generality of students, who usually enter upon the study with disgust; who are seldom desirous, or perhaps capable, of making such a proficiency in it as to derive any real advantage from it; and who, not unfrequently, when they have once forsaken the walls of the college, insensibly lose, by neglect, the knowledge they had acquired by long and laborious application: or if it be retained, it produces no visible effect upon their general modes of thinking or acting. “We recognize immediately,” says the author of the Rambler,

“the philologist, the critic, the philosopher, or the man of taste; but years after years may elapse before we discover, that the man with whom we have frequent intercourse is an able mathematician.”

However important mathematical science may be deemed, as it relates to the community, with respect to such persons it terminates wholly in speculation, which is the reproach Mr. Knox wishes to fix upon the study of Metaphysics. But this is not all: “Metaphysics,” according to Mr. Knox, “tend only to benight the understanding in a cloud of its own making; to lose it in a labyrinth of its own contrivance.” But those who pay only a slight and superficial attention to any subject of an abstruse and recondite nature, are very willing, and find it very easy to persuade themselves, that the cloud in which they are involved necessarily arises from the subject itself; and are rarely inclined to suspect their own ignorance, incapacity, or prejudice. It must however be acknowledged, that Metaphysics cannot be entirely vindicated from the charge of obscurity. A certain degree of darkness and doubt hangs over all our investigations on these mysterious subjects: but we ought carefully to distinguish between that obscurity which arises from the nature of the subject, and which is necessarily connected

connected with it, and the obscurity which arises from the want of a proper and adequate attention to the subject.

“ Metaphysics, Mr. Knox farther observes, were once encouraged and cultivated, because they served the purposes of superstition. They involved theological subjects in a perplexity which the simple could never unravel. They gave an air of mystery and depth which caught the admiration of the vulgar. They are now employed in a similar manner in the service of infidelity. They have induced the half-learned and the conceited, those who think they understand them, and those who wish to be thought by others to understand them, to adopt, without being apprehensive of danger, opinions fatal to their own happiness and to the existence of society.” Notwithstanding the volubility and smartness of this declamation, it will not be too much for Mr. Knox to concede, that even in Metaphysics there is such a distinction as truth and falsehood; and that of two opposite opinions, if one is wrong the other must be right. Now it is difficult to devise how those false and dangerous metaphysical opinions alluded to, opinions which have produced effects so fatal to the happiness and even to the existence of society, can ever be properly and satisfactorily confuted but by metaphysical arguments. Certainly just
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and rational sentiments in Metaphysics must be serviceable to the general cause of virtue and happiness, in exactly the same proportion that the false and absurd opinions to which he refers are prejudicial and dangerous. No doubt the study of Metaphysics may, in particular instances, have produced an unhappy effect upon the minds of “the half-learned and conceited”—upon those whose capacities were unequal to the discussion of subjects of this nature, or upon those who engaged in the pursuit of them with previous corrupt and vicious propensities. The study of theology is likewise liable to the same objection. But what then? To borrow the noble and decisive argument of Hamlet, “If the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog,”—is that glorious luminary the just object of reproach? The interests of truth, virtue and happiness, are inseparably connected; and if any particular opinions in Metaphysics are unfavorable to those interests, why should any man who has paid proper attention to the subject be blamed for exposing their fallacy or falsehood? “But even when cultivated by the honest and truly ingenious, they exhibit, as Mr. Knox asserts, an instance of blameable pride: they aim at a science to which man can never attain. It is truly laughable to observe a creature, with hardly knowledge enough of the things around him to guide him
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with safety, perplexing himself with ontological enquiries into the nature of angels and the essence of the devil." Of the attainments, however, which may be reached by such men as Locke, Hartley, and Clarke, one who has never cultivated these studies must be a very incompetent judge. And let their attainments be ever so slender, it is hard to incur blame for their pride in employing their time and talents in disquisitions of this nature, because previously to the trial no one, Mr. Knox excepted, could pretend to say what degree of proficiency it was practicable to arrive at. So far inferior indeed were they in extent and depth of research to Mr. Knox, that so far as appears, even the very names escaped them of those writers "who have perplexed themselves by ontological enquiries into the nature of angels and the essence of the devil."

"The Ontologists and Pneumatologists, the *Nominales* and *Reales*, the *Doctores Seraphici*, and all the tribe of microscopic philosophers, are in the present age of discernment, as Mr. Knox further informs us, totally neglected. Even Malebranche and Locke, the most rational of the Metaphysicians, are daily losing ground. A few, however, in the present times have been so unfortunate as to waste their labour in defending Materialism, in expatiating on Liberty and Ne-

cessity, and in proving that Man is no more than an animal." It is true, the metaphysical opinions of the middle ages, as contained in the laborious works of those philosophers who go under the general denomination of the Schoolmen, many of whom were men of admirable talents, and the whole Aristotelian system are now exploded. The dogmas of the Stagyrice are justly superseded, by the more rational and intelligible hypothesis of Des-Cartes and Locke. But whoever represents this total change of system as a proof of the uncertainty and futility of metaphysical researches in general should recollect, that natural philosophy has undergone a revolution equally striking: that the system of Locke and Hartley does not differ more from that of Thomas Aquinas, than the Newtonian theory of the universe does from the Ptolemaic. In the present age of discernment, however, it seems that even Locke is daily losing ground: and whenever the discernment of the age shall happily arrive to an equality with that of Mr. Knox, the *Essay on Human Understanding* will no doubt be completely discarded.

"Such miserable effects of metaphysical research," continues Mr. Knox, "have induced an amiable writer, whose heart and abilities vie with each other for excellence, to vindicate the nature and immutability of truth; to expose the
futility

futility of Metaphysics; to confound the devices of its patrons, and to establish the natural rights of common sense." This formidable champion has, it seems, "given the last fatal blow to languishing sophistry." To be serious—the truly elegant productions of Dr. Beattie have been received by the public with just and distinguished applause. Many will, nevertheless, think it fortunate for that ingenious writer that his literary reputation does not depend upon his skill in Metaphysics. Truth is, surely, under little obligation to a champion who confesses his inability to oppose argument to argument, and silence sophistry by just reasoning; and who, by way of compensation, pretends to erect for her protection, as a dernier resort, a court of appeal, in which a pretended infallible judge, a kind of Pope, resides, stiled by Dr. Beattie "Common Sense;" but his true name is by others said to be "Vulgar Prejudice;" who decides, in cases which have been thought very intricate, without a moment's hesitation, and without giving himself the trouble to hear counsel on either side, though both parties are very desirous of pleading their respective causes, and allege that they have much to offer in their own defence. Dr. Beattie's elaborate work is, however, not without its use. An honest, well meaning man, such as Mr. Knox describes in his forty-second Essay, who,

for the first forty or fifty years of his life, has studied no other books than his journal and ledger, and afterwards retires into the country to study Berkeley and Hume, may well be alarmed, when he finds that, between them, he is absolutely in danger of being argued out of his existence: since one undertakes to prove that he has no soul, and the other clearly demonstrates that he has no body. But when he opens this incomparable treatise of Dr. Beattie, he is overjoyed to find that he is indeed the very same identical person that he took himself to be before he began to study Metaphysics. And he has the satisfaction to be informed, as he proceeds in the farther perusal of the work, that he may become an able Metaphysician at a much easier rate than he himself hoped for, or could have imagined. In short, he is told that common sense alone, without any previous instruction, is sufficient to enable a man to decide upon the most abstruse questions of that abstruse science; and he shuts the book again, fully convinced that he is as great a philosopher as Locke, Berkeley, or Hume. He is now completely qualified to exclaim against all metaphysical reasonings as futile, useless, unintelligible, and dangerous; and fully prepared to assert, that a single sermon of Tillotson has done more real good than all the metaphy-

taphysical works of Dr. Clarke*; and to show that he is biaſſed by no blind partiality for that famous prelate, he may take occaſion to add, that the droll inventions of Hogarth have been of more ſervice to the cauſe of virtue than all the ſermons of Tillotſon.†

* Vide Eſſay 168.

† Vide Eſſay 48.

ESSAY XVI.

ON THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE.

THERE are some truths which all mankind agree to regard as first principles; the clearness and certainty of them are such as preclude even the possibility of a doubt; and all attempts, therefore, to establish or confirm them by argument are not only superfluous, but absurd and ridiculous; and we laugh, without scruple, at the philosopher who gravely exclaims “*Cogito, ergo sum.*” There are other truths of great magnitude and importance, which cannot, indeed, properly be stiled self-evident; for they are capable of being opposed, and of being supported by argument; but the arguments on the one side are so obvious and convincing, and on the other so weak and futile, that candor itself cannot, without difficulty, believe the most ignorant and prejudiced of mankind incapable of discerning the disparity.

The question relating to the African Slave Trade, considered either in a civil or a moral view, may be adduced as an instance exactly in point. It is so flagrant and enormous a violation of the most sacred and fundamental laws of justice and
humanity

humanity—it so evidently sets at defiance all those obligations which result from the nature of civil society, and the unalterable principles of equitable and legitimate government, that one cannot, without astonishment and indignation, view the necessity of entering into a regular discussion of the question, and of formally exhibiting a train of arguments in order to prove this horrible traffic to be the height of moral and political depravity. The famous Abbé Terrai, Comptroller of the Finances in France during the latter part of the reign of Louis XV. on being informed that a certain iniquitous measure proposed by him was universally condemned as highly oppressive and unjust, replied coolly, “Who pretends that it is just?” This may be stiled the magnanimity of villany. That abandoned Minister, at least, was not guilty of the crime of lowering the standard of moral rectitude, and of endeavoring to debase the sentiments of mankind to a level with his own practice. But the advocates for the Slave Trade do not rest satisfied with practical villany: they are ambitious of distinguishing themselves by a speculative attachment to it. Rather than renounce an hypothesis which they deem themselves interested to maintain, they would reverse the general order of the universe, and the constitution of nature. They would fain persuade us that
virtue

virtue may subsist, though it is not nourished by the milk of human kindness; and that vice does not consist in cruelty, rapine, treachery, and violence. So long, therefore, as there are those who think it moral and just to extend the sphere of human misery, it may be of use to consider and confute their wretched pleas in defence or extenuation of their guilty principles, or yet more guilty practice.

First, It is alleged, that the Negroes are an inferior and subordinate race of men; and it is, therefore, allowable to treat them as such without incurring the imputation of cruelty and injustice. “What!” to borrow the language of Shylock, “hath not a Negroe eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer that a Christian is?” Say, ye profound philosophers, ye enlightened sages, who inhabit the shores of Mersey and of Avon, by what criterion of rationality have you ascertained the intellectual inferiority of this devoted race? Will you venture to affirm, that the inhabitants of Africa are at present in a state of greater inferiority, compared with you, their high and mighty lords; *you*, who hold so conspicuous and so honorable a rank in the scale of
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intelligent beings—than your ancestors, the ancient Britons, compared with the Romans of the Augustan age? But, allowing this to be the case, their imbecillity of understanding, in the view of infinite wisdom and benevolence, only gives them an additional claim to your indulgence and protection. That the power implies the right of oppression, is a discovery in political morality worthy of such sagacious and profound investigators of the natural rights of mankind, as the LOCKES, the BLACKSTONES, and the MONTESQUIEUS, trading to the coast of Guinea.

2dly, The Slave Trade, *mirabile dictu!* is gravely vindicated on the principles of humanity; as being highly beneficial to those who are apparently the victims of it; for they are affirmed to be principally composed of prisoners of war, who would, in all probability, be slaughtered in cold blood, if their enemies were deprived of this more advantageous mode of disposing of them. What! is it then the voice of humanity that we hear pleading in defence of a practice, the very idea of which must excite, in every breast susceptible of the feelings of humanity, amazement and horror? View yon vessel, with sails expanded, ploughing the deep!—Contemplate, for a moment, the scene which it exhibits!—Within that receptacle of human misery
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are contained hundreds of beings possessing passions and feelings congenial to thine own. Behold them bereft of every enjoyment which can render life a blessing; exposed to every outrage which can render existence a curse.

Dire is the tossing, deep the groans! Despair
Tending the sick, busiest from couch to couch,
And over them triumphant death his dart
Shakes, but delays to strike, tho' oft invok'd,
With vows, as their chief good and final hope.

Is this the scene which humanity delights to view? Or is it a scene at which she recoils and stands aghast? Let not then that sacred name be profaned, and wrested to purposes abhorrent from its nature.—No: it is hypocrisy which assumes the garb of humanity, and “which hides the dagger underneath the gown.” If a more specific answer to this insidious plea be required, let these pretended advocates for humanity be told, that the wars which crowd their ships with slaves have chiefly originated, and will for ever be perpetuated by the prospect of advantage which the sale of the prisoners affords. Let them be told, that amongst the most savage and barbarous nations, the practice of indiscriminate slaughter in cold blood never habitually obtained. But at all events, if the personal happiness or benefit of the slave is indeed the primary object of the slave merchant,

merchant, certainly those philanthropists, who engage in this traffic from such noble and generous motives, must consider the previous consent of the slave as absolutely necessary, to give validity to the purchase. If, therefore, he quit his native country voluntarily, what occasion for whips, and racks, and chains, to enforce obedience? But it is an insult to common sense to pursue this argument farther. To devote to misery and ruin hecatombs of guiltless human victims, for the pretended purpose of preventing some possible evil, or obtaining some possible good, is, in a being so limited as man, a mode of conduct proceeding from the most impious presumption, or frantic folly.

3dly, Another argument, of nearly the same complexion with the former, is this, that though the forcible seizure of the negroes is an act of injustice, yet the injury is slight and ideal, as they enjoy a degree of happiness in their state of bondage little, if at all, inferior to that which they possessed in their native country. Haughty and unfeeling tyrant! whose heart has long been callous to all the sensibilities which distinguish and which ennoble humanity: in vain would the miserable beings, subject to thy dominion, complain to thee of the pangs they feel, when with reverted eyes they cast the last, long, lingering look upon their native shores! Engrossed by
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one fatal passion, the rage of accumulating wealth, how canst thou sympathize with the emotions excited by the various relations of social and domestic life? “by all the charities of father, son, and brother?” Untaught to weep with those that weep, thy mind possesses no congenial feelings with those whose miseries have in thy estimation degraded them almost below the condition of humanity. Regarding them as belonging to the brutal rather than the intelligent creation, perhaps, in the excess of your goodness you permit them such accommodations as nature, thus deplorably degraded, may require. You hear, indeed, the noise of the lash resounding in your ears, accompanied with the groans and shrieks of the wretched sufferers: but this disturbs not your repose, for you know the utility, nay, what you stile the necessity of thus employing it. And the hidden anguish of the heart, the complicated woe which bids defiance to the power of language, the silent agony which pervades and overwhelms every faculty of the soul, escape your notice, or are thought unworthy of your attention. They are pronounced to be the effects of obstinacy, of sullenness, of malice, or revenge: the whip, therefore, must be applied in order to enforce some degree of corporeal exertion; and, by inflicting excruciating torture on the body, some relief, perhaps, is unintentionally

tionally afforded to the more dreadful torture of the mind. If, however, this is only rhetorical exaggeration; if it is, indeed, true, that a state of slavery is a state of happiness; if those, who are originally reduced to this state by violence, become easily and speedily reconciled to it; let the Colonial Legislatures, merely for the satisfaction of the world, and for the complete refutation of those accusations which so deeply affect their public character and conduct, enact a law that every Negroe, who declares himself dissatisfied with his situation, shall not only be immediately emancipated, but conveyed back to his native country at the public charge. This is bringing the matter to a fair issue; and if none, or if only a small proportion of those to whom this offer is made, think it deserving of their acceptance, then, and not till then, will I acknowledge the native of Africa to be a being of a different and subordinate species to the man who presumes to call himself his owner; then, and not till then, will I acknowledge that those principles, which we regard as the basis of the common rights of humanity, are, as to him, wholly inapplicable, and entirely void of any just foundation.

4thly, It is farther alleged, in vindication of this detestable commerce, that, however great the sufferings of the wretched Africans may be, they are fully compensated by the inestimable advan-

tage of possessing, though in a state of slavery, the means of instruction in the principles of the true religion. From ignorant heathens, they have an opportunity of becoming enlightened Christians; and slavery itself is said to be a state which Christianity pronounces neither unlawful nor inexpedient. This argument must be regarded as no other than an impious and cruel mockery. It is to add the highest insult to the highest injury. Allowing this fable of conversion to be fact, can it change the nature of those acts of savage violence for which it is to atone? But the fact notoriously is, that the planters are almost universally averse to the conversion of their slaves. In consequence of the laudable and laborious efforts of a few individuals of obscure name, though of exalted worth, some proselytes have indeed been made; and great must be their astonishment, when they attained to a competent knowledge of Christianity, to find the practice of Christians so opposite to its dictates. Openly and avowedly to violate all sanctions human and divine, for the purpose of converting heathens into Christians, would be carrying fanaticism to the highest pitch of religious phrenzy: and to pretend to act with that view when we are wholly actuated by self-interested motives, is the vilest and most detestable species of hypocrisy. It is possible that heathens in such a case may eventually

tually become Christians; but those Christians, who practise such methods of conversion, are themselves in a state infinitely worse than heathenism.

As to the plea that Christianity does not condemn slavery as unlawful, it can never be seriously urged but by those who are strangers to the genius and spirit of Christianity. The sublime object which that religion has in view, is the happiness present and future of the whole human race: but it is to be remarked that Christianity only inculcates general principles, and leaves the application of them to our own understandings, which are, indeed, when properly cultivated, fully adequate to the purpose. Benevolence is the grand, the characteristic virtue of a Christian; but there are a thousand different modes of bringing that virtue into action which are not distinctly specified in the sacred writings. We find, indeed, admirable directions for our conduct in a great variety of respects; but, then, those directions resulted from the occasional application of those general principles to particular cases, according to the discretion of the several writers. There is no proper limitation of benevolence, as an active principle, but the impracticability of its farther extension. And if we, who so justly and highly venerate the characters and writings of the Apostles, should be enabled, by means of

that superiority of light and knowledge which in some respects we undoubtedly enjoy, to apply this grand principle to cases which did not occur to them, we act in a manner perfectly conformable to the genius and spirit of Christianity, though the authority of a positive precept may be wanting. St. Paul, probably, had no idea of a state of civil society, in which the spirit of liberty would operate to the total annihilation of the very condition of slavery. He contented himself, therefore, with giving directions worthy of an Apostle for the religious conduct of masters and servants under actually existing circumstances. But enlightened Christians in the present age well know that slavery may be, and in many Christian countries has, in fact, been totally abolished, not only with safety, but with real advantage to society, and a great increase of the general happiness. They, therefore, justly condemn the state itself as inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity, however pardonable, or even justifiable, in peculiar circumstances, may be an acquiescence in a state of things not in the power of individuals to alter. But the evils attending the Slave Trade are of a nature very different and of a far greater magnitude than those which necessarily result from the mere condition of slavery. In no state of society can a practice, involving in it circumstances of such atrocious and enormous

guilt,

guilt, be considered as defensible by any person whose understanding is not darkened by the turpitude of his heart; in whom, not only the feelings of the moral sense are extinguished, but, in this instance, at least, every ray even of common sense.

5thly, The Slave Trade is defended on the ground of political necessity. Many affect to commiserate the unhappy condition of the *poor Negroes*, and to lament the continuance of a practice which they allow to be founded on manifest injustice. But, however exceptionable the Slave Trade may be in a moral view, the political necessity of the case, say they, renders it impossible to effect any essential alterations in a system now established by the prescription of ages. The plantations in the West Indies can be cultivated only by Negroes; the climate is fatal to all but African constitutions; and the labour such as that hardy race of men only can support; but any *regulations*, for the purpose of preventing actual or possible abuses, they profess themselves anxious to adopt and to enforce. This is the language of those who wish much to be virtuous, but more to be rich; of those who honour humanity with their lips, but whose hearts are strangers to its divine influence. The political inconveniences which may result from the abolition of the Slave Trade may, indeed, be plausibly urged

as a motive for acting with caution and deliberation, as an argument against a precipitate annihilation of a commerce which has been so long practised, that its immediate and total suppression might be represented as productive of greater evil than the continuance of it for a limited time under certain restrictions; but seriously to maintain that the most sacred moral obligations ought to be superseded by mere political considerations, is an assertion which renders every attempt at confutation superfluous. It is sufficient therefore to observe, that the dangers to be apprehended from the abolition of this infamous traffic, are not by any means so great as these interested politicians seem to imagine.

Numerous and well authenticated facts incontrovertibly demonstrate, that with mild and indulgent treatment, the present number of slaves in the West India Islands might not only be preserved from diminution, but would admit of considerable increase; there even is reason to believe that a gradual emancipation of the slaves would be attended with much benefit to the planter, the Quakers having actually made the experiment with success, and universal experience proving the soil of every country to be most advantageously improved and cultivated by the voluntary labours of the native inhabitants. And could we suppose the possibility of such a
dreadful

dreadful calamity, as the eventual rise of Muscovado sugars a few shillings in the hundred weight, in consequence of the additional expence of culture, it is plain that neither the proprietor, the planter, or the merchant, have any just ground of alarm, for the loss must necessarily fall upon the public, who, to their great honor, seem perfectly well disposed to sustain, with fortitude, whatever inconvenience may be incurred in consequence of the annihilation of a branch of commerce now become the object of public execration. As to any regulations which may be proposed, in order to effect a reformation of the abuses attending this commerce, it is obvious to reply, that the trade itself is an abuse, the most enormous of all abuses, the most atrocious of all crimes. To enact a law, therefore, for regulating, *i. e.* for establishing the Slave Trade, and for preventing the abuses attending it, would be an absurdity in morals and in legislation as monstrous as to pass an act authorizing theft, murder, and adultery, adding, at the same time, certain provisions to obviate the *abuses* that might accidentally be associated with those practices. This is a case which disdains all offers of concession, all attempts at amicable accommodation. In fact, what object of importance could be gained by any system of commercial regulation which the warmest advocates of these devoted victims could

devise? Would they not still be infamously robbed of all that can soothe and compensate the cares and sorrows of life? Would they not still be doomed to suffer, in a foreign land, all that the rage and malice of the petty despots, whose *property* they become, may prompt them to inflict? "The world is not their friend, nor the world's law," nor indeed is it possible that any law should be effectual for the protection of those who are utterly destitute of the proper means of enforcing it.

LASTLY, It is urged, that the abolition of this traffic would deprive of the means of subsistence a numerous body of artizans and manufacturers, who are now employed in fabricating those articles of commerce which are exported to Africa, for the purchase of the slaves annually imported into the colonies. In our attempts to relieve one species of distress, we should undoubtedly endeavor to guard as much as possible against the creation of another; and to this argument some degree of attention is due, as tending to evince the *impolicy* of an immediate and unconditional abolition of the Slave Trade; and it is in vain to expect that upon the principles of natural justice alone this question will be decided. If however a plan were framed—a task surely not very difficult, should the immediate abolition be unhappily adjudged impracticable—for the
speedy

speedy eventual extinction of this horrid commerce, the supernumerary artizans and manufacturers at home would have opportunity to apply themselves to other kinds of employment. But by the adoption of a wise and liberal system of policy, there is abundant reason to believe that a trade to the coast of Africa, far more extensive and beneficial than the present, might be established on a much more solid and permanent foundation. But these are speculations foreign to the purpose of this Essay. Upon the whole we may with confidence affirm, that regulations for the purpose of obviating the political inconveniences which might possibly result from the abolition of the Slave Trade, would do honor to the most enlightened legislature ; but a feeble attempt to satisfy the demands of honor and conscience, by any pretended regulations for the mere purpose of preventing or of rectifying the abuses of that trade, which is itself the most flagrant of all abuses which the annals of the world exhibit, would disgrace the understandings and detract from the dignity even of a convention of Hottentots.

ESSAY XVII.

REFLECTIONS UPON EDUCATION.

THERE are two very opposite opinions prevailing in the world respecting human life ; one is, that “ *Life is a jest :*” and for the benefit and instruction of posterity this maxim has been recorded on a monument, placed amid the venerable remains of all that mankind have been taught to call good and great. The other is, that life is not a jest, but a most serious and important reality ; and however transient its duration, if it be regarded as the first stage of a progressive and ceaseless existence, the manner in which it is passed may, or rather must in a very essential degree influence our future, nay if the voice of religion deserve regard, our everlasting happiness or misery.

In the celebrated Letters of Lord Chesterfield, we see with a mixture of pity and indignation a man of high station, a man of parts, of observation and reflection, who does not appear even in the decline of life to have raised his thoughts or wishes beyond that species of enjoyment which is to be derived from temporal distinctions ;

tinctions; of which he had himself experienced the vanity, but which he nevertheless urges his son to pursue with such intemperate ardour, that honor, virtue and reputation are without hesitation to be sacrificed at the shrine of the idol which his Lordship has set up. So far as virtue is connected with fashion it is to be followed; so far as vice implies vulgarity it is to be shunned, and the only things of universal and perpetual obligation are to enter gracefully into a room, to dance a good minuet, to make a genteel bow, to pare your nails close, and to keep your teeth clean.

To dismiss all farther mention of this foolish and profligate system, it is of importance to remark, 1st, That the culture of the human mind cannot commence at too early a period. An infant who has attained to the use of language is capable of receiving numberless ideas; and it is of great moment that the first ideas with which the mind of a child is impressed should be such as are favorable to virtue. The light of reason begins to dawn much sooner than is perhaps generally imagined; and the difference between children who have not passed the years of infancy with respect both to virtue and knowledge is such as negligent observers would not easily credit. Never was there an idea more absurd and pernicious than that suggested by M. Rousseau,

seau, respecting the propriety of keeping children in ignorance till they have attained to an age in which they can judge without prejudice. This visionary and paradoxical writer tells us, “ that the greatest and most useful rule of education is this—‘ not to gain time, but to lose it.’ —We should not *tamper* with the mind till it has acquired all its faculties: for it is impossible it should perceive the light we hold out to it while it is blind. The first part of education therefore ought to be purely negative. If you could be content to do nothing yourself, and could prevent any thing from being done by others; if you could bring up your pupil healthy and robust to the age of twelve years, without his being able to distinguish his right hand from his left, the eyes of his understanding would be open to reason at your first lesson. Void both of habit and prejudice, his passions would not operate against your endeavors; and he would become under proper instructions the wisest of men. It is thus, by attempting nothing in the beginning, you might produce a prodigy of education.”* A prodigy indeed! But not to enter upon a formal confutation of an opinion so wild and eccentric, is it not evident that ignorance in this case can only mean ignorance of

* Emilius, Vol. I. p. 128.

what is good? For if the blossoms of virtue and knowledge do not appear in consequence of early diligence in sowing the seed, the weeds of idleness and vice will infallibly overspread the soil; weeds which it will afterwards be found difficult, if not impossible to eradicate. In fact, the first opinions we embrace, at whatever time of life we may commence our enquiries, are, and must be those of our immediate instructors. Nor is the evil in the least diminished by delaying the period of that commencement. Happy is it when those instructors encourage their pupils impartially to investigate the opinions which they inculcate, and take a real satisfaction in diffusing the liberal spirit of free inquiry and unreserved discussion.

2dly, Some very worthy and respectable people have, unfortunately, imbibed a notion, that the parental authority ought to be exercised with rigour, and that implicit obedience is almost the only lesson which needs to be inculcated. Of the fatal effects of this plan, experience exhibits the most melancholy proofs. Virtue is, indeed, with such persons, the great object of education; but it is associated with ideas so gloomy, it presents an aspect so harsh and disgusting, that youth, naturally averse to seriousness, and much more to austerity, flies to vice as to a refuge: and at that critical period of life, when the restraints so long
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impatiently submitted to must, at last, suffer relaxation, is too often seen to throw off every appearance of regard to that which has ever been the object of its secret aversion. All recreations, tending either to health or rational amusement, should be not only allowed but encouraged. An unreserved intercourse of conversation; promoted by kindness, condescension, and a flattering appearance of regard and attention. The first principles of knowledge and virtue may be inculcated in a thousand different ways by a skilful and watchful instructor: and the understanding will make rapid and vigorous shoots where it has free scope to expand itself in all directions; and if the early blossoms appear somewhat luxuriant, it is far better than that “Nature’s wild vigour, working at the root,” should be chilled by neglect or blasted by severity. Mildness and indulgence, guided by good sense and prudence, on the part of the parent, must necessarily generate affection and gratitude on the part of the children. And if they are chargeable with a failure of duty in those respects, it is, assuredly, owing to some radical error in the conduct of education.

3dly, As to the long contested question respecting the superior eligibility of a public or private education, it must be allowed, that all the powers and faculties of the mind have a
freer

freer scope and a wider range in a public than a private feminary. And a man who has had the advantage of a public education will, in general, retain through life a certain superiority over another, of equal capacity and knowledge, brought up under the care of a domestic tutor.

With respect to classical learning also, public schools have a manifest advantage over private seminaries. And though the general rule in this case must, after all, admit of many exceptions, and the true question is, not whether a public or private education is best, but whether the one or the other is best for a particular individual? yet still, for a majority, a public education will probably be found most eligible. In order to secure the advantages which may, with proper care and caution, be expected from this mode of education, the most assiduous endeavors should, doubtless, be used, from the earliest dawn of reason, to inculcate just and noble principles of action. And for some years previous to the entrance of a youth into this interesting scene, by that mild wisdom which secures the affections while it informs the understanding, much may be effected by parental attention, without encroaching upon the province, or formally assuming the authority of a tutor; and much more at that period when the intellectual powers advance rapidly towards maturity,

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and knowledge already begins to be pursued as the means of mental gratification. It is a frequent subject of complaint, that little besides the learned languages is attended to at the public schools. But at the age of thirteen or fourteen, which seems to be the proper period for entering into those seminaries, no inconsiderable stock of knowledge may reasonably be supposed, in a mind properly cultivated, to have been already attained. A general idea of ancient and modern history, the first elements of geographical and mathematical science, a perfect familiarity with the French language, and a considerable proficiency in the Greek and Latin tongues, may, at least, be presumed. The proper business of a public school is to perfect a youth thus prepared in classical literature. And, surely, it is not easy to read the higher classics without acquiring, at the same time, with an accurate knowledge of the languages, a knowledge of a far superior kind—a knowledge of facts, characters, and opinions, connected with the most distinguished and illustrious periods of the general history of mankind. When an intimate acquaintance with the learned languages, and with those various kinds of knowledge which are to be derived from a study of the most celebrated writers in those languages, is acquired, the proper period arrives for a removal to the universities,

ties, where a regular superstructure may be erected upon the extensive and solid foundation previously laid. And, certainly, with right dispositions, and a mind properly prepared and cultivated, a youth may make as rapid improvements in every branch of useful knowledge at Oxford or Cambridge, with all their numerous and acknowledged defects, as at any seat of learning in Europe. Of this the many great and illustrious characters formed there afford the most honorable and decisive proofs.

4thly, In this cursory sketch it would be improper entirely to omit to speak of the fashion, which is become so universal, of sending young men of fortune, after they have taken their degree at the university, to make what is called the *grand tour*. No doubt, many plausible, and some just things, may be said of the advantages to be derived from foreign travel: but, in order to attain those advantages, it is necessary to have a mind much better prepared and cultivated than the generality of our young men of fashion possess. To expose an inexperienced youth, who has a very slight tincture of knowledge, and no true relish for it; whose passions are strong, and in whose mind no fixed principles of virtue are implanted to counteract their influence, to the temptations which he must inevitably encounter in such a situation, is to expose him to almost certain

ruin. The advice or remonstrances of a governor can no more avail to stem the torrent of dissipation and vice, than a bulrush can stop the inundations of the Nile. If a youth is so devoid of sense, or of virtue, as to need a *governor*, he is not, indeed, in such a state of mind as to be capable of improvement by travel. The true and sole dependence is to be placed on those principles which have previously been inculcated; and upon that sense of honor which is so powerful in youthful minds; which is so happily calculated “to aid and strengthen virtue when it meets her,” and which often “imitates her actions where she is not.”

Little stress is to be placed upon those external accomplishments and graces of behaviour which some suppose only to be acquired in foreign courts. The most pleasing manners to Englishmen are such as are truly English: and many persons, who have never quitted their native country, possess a polish and urbanity not to be exceeded by those who have been presented at every court in Europe. And when the behaviour of such as have been accustomed to good company is apparently changed, in consequence of their residence abroad, it is generally changed for the worse. Not to speak of those who are commonly called *travelled coxcombs*, and who are so justly the subject of universal ridicule, even
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the behaviour of men of sense and fashion, when they have, in any degree, contracted the air and manners of foreigners, is, generally speaking, so far displeasing. At all events, it would be happy for the continent, and much for the credit of our own country, if a stop were put to that egress of riotous and dissipated English youth, which has so long been a subject of complaint abroad; and who, to the evil dispositions they carry out with them, add the follies and vices of every clime and country which they visit.—When such men make it their boast, that “Europe they saw,” let them recollect, that “Europe saw them too,” and they will have little reason to indulge any emotions of vanity derived from this imaginary source of superiority.

END OF VOL. I.



